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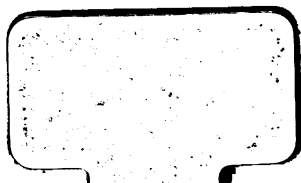
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HELEN HERVEY'S  
CHANGE





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"I will not detain you longer now; I see you were just going out. Will you promise me before I go, to think of what I have said?"—P. 24.

# HELEN HERVEY'S CHANGE;

OR,

Out of Darkness into Light.

BY

MARIA ENGLISH.

LONDON:

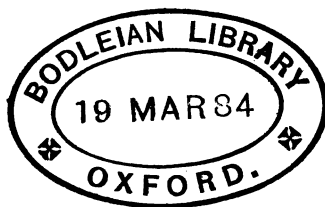
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# HELEN HERVEY'S CHANGE;

OR,

OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT.



## CHAPTER I.

QUAINT gabled cottage stood in a pretty garden, just on the outskirts of a little country town. Surrounded by tall handsome shrubs, and sheltered from the road by a line of overhanging trees, it was as pretty and secluded a home as heart could wish. The prevailing characteristic of the place was neatness. The gravel walks were carefully weeded, the grass closely mown, the flower-beds well kept, the paint on the house fresh and clean, and everything around in perfect order.

A quiet, unpretending cottage it was; and yet

its occupant might have lived in a much larger house, and in much grander style, if she had chosen, for she was rich. But she did not choose to do so. Miss Falconer had lived here for nearly thirty years in the strictest seclusion. She never entertained visitors, and never visited anywhere herself. Even her only brother, who lived within a mile, rarely saw her, except when he met her accidentally. Some said she was proud—some that her brain was affected—some that she had met with a disappointment in her youth ; but one and all agreed that she was a sour, morose, discontented old maid.

But it was not so. Early in life she had withdrawn herself from the world, and in perfect solitude devoted herself to religion. She had had no disappointment. She possessed a calm, placid temperament, with no great depth of feeling, and her passions and affections were too much under her control to go astray and cause her lifelong sorrow. It was simply a question of duty with her. It was no great sacrifice to her to give up the social pleasures and family ties that are so dear to some. The world had no strong hold upon her heart, and when she withdrew herself

from it, it was without any very passionate regret. She deemed it her duty to make the sacrifice, and what little pain it occasioned her was amply compensated for by the feeling of self-approval that followed it.

So she took her solitary way, and as the years went on she was not unhappy. Sufficient to herself, and wrapped up in her religious duties, she had no yearning for the affection and sympathy of her fellow-creatures, but held herself aloof from them, unconsciously looking down upon the weaknesses and follies that she felt herself superior to.

The poor and suffering were her especial care ; but this also was from a sense of duty, not from a sympathetic pity for their misfortunes. Much of her time was given to visiting the poor—much to working for charitable purposes at home—the rest she spent in devotional exercises.

And so her uneventful days passed away, until at last there was a change, and Helen Hervey came to live with her. Helen Hervey was her niece—the child of her only sister. She was an orphan, left by her parents to the care of her aunt, and she had been at school near London,

until she came to find a home in her aunt's quiet cottage.

She was hardly welcome there. Miss Falconer would rather have been left to the solitude she had enjoyed so long, but she felt it her duty to receive the orphan girl, and that was enough. Perhaps her secret unwillingness gave a tinge of coldness to her reception of Helen, but anyhow the girl was chilled and disappointed. Young, impulsive, and warm-hearted, she came prepared to love her aunt, to cheer her solitude, and be a companion to her in her declining years; but when she saw Miss Falconer, she felt instinctively that she neither needed nor asked anything of her. She meant to be kind, but she was hardly a fit guardian and companion for a young, loving, and impressionable girl, who was longing for some one to look up to and to love.

The quiet, monotonous life at the cottage, too, was irksome to the young girl. Accustomed to the bustle and activity of her school-life, she found her new home very dull at first. Absorbed in her usual occupations, Miss Falconer left her niece to her own resources a great deal, and, a stranger as she was, it is hardly to be wondered

at that she felt lonely. But she made the best she could of it. When her aunt would let her, she helped her at her work, watered her flowers, went out to make little purchases for her, and occasionally carried little gifts of food or money to the poor recipients of Miss Falconer's bounty.

So things went on for some time, and then Helen's uncle sought her out, and invited her to his house. Mr. Falconer had a son and daughter, who were only too glad to make friends with their cousin, and when the ice was once broken between them, there was no more solitude for Helen. Rich, and fond of society, they were much sought after by the wealthy people of the neighbourhood, who were equally ready to open their doors to Helen when she appeared among them. So, for a time, she lived in a whirl of gaiety.

Miss Falconer disapproved of it all, but she did not attempt to interfere with her niece. She preferred being alone, and as long as she was left to pursue her work undisturbed, she did not stop to consider what harm might be coming to Helen through the friendship of her cousins. As for the girl herself, she was delighted with her new-found friends, and very soon she was only happy when

she could leave her aunt's quiet home and enjoy herself in their company.

The sun was shining brightly one morning when Helen rose from her breakfast and went out into the garden. From sheer want of other employment, she spent much time among the flowers, of which she was very fond. The garden was too well kept for her to find much to do ; but a rose-tree needed a support here, or a few dead leaves had to be cut away there, and she was soon busy at work, singing softly to herself the while. She had been to a party at her uncle's the night before, and half unconsciously she hummed the joyous refrain of a song she had heard there, as her thoughts went back to the gay scene.

She was still employed in this way, when the click of the garden gate made her turn quickly. A gentleman emerged from behind the tall shrubs, and came towards her—a tall, thin, grave-looking man, evidently a clergyman by his dress. Helen came forward to meet him.

“Good morning, Mr. Seymour,” she said. “You are out early this morning.”

“Yes; I have been to see a person who lies at the point of death.”

"How indefatigable you are!" said Helen. "You are always at work, early and late. You don't seem to give yourself any rest."

He shook his head with a grave smile.

"Ah, Miss Hervey, life is short, and it is well to make the best use we can of the little time which is allotted to us. Sin and sickness and sorrow are rife in the world; men are dying around us every day, and can we see them passing away into eternity without stretching out a hand to guide them in the right direction—without pointing out to them the way to their own true home beyond the grave? As for rest, there will come a time for that by and by, when our labour is ended." He paused, and then asked, "Is your aunt at home?—Ah, I see she is! I see her at the window."

He passed on towards the house as he spoke, and Helen, left alone, sat down on a garden seat near, and fell into deep thought. His earnest words had sunk deep into her heart. "Men are dying around us every day," he had said. Yes, it was true—she knew it. And yet how gaily, how unconcernedly she had gone on her way in life, without a thought of the future, when death



might be hovering over her even now, and another step might launch her into eternity! She had hitherto drifted idly onward on the stream of life, without pausing to consider whither she was going; but now she asked herself what was to be the end of this life that was now opening so brightly before her. Could she lift the veil that shrouded the future from her gaze, what should she see?

She had her hours of thoughtfulness sometimes. She was just the age when the soul, awaking from the misty hopes and visions of childhood, finds itself face to face with the great realities of life and death, time and eternity, and feels for the first time that they *are* realities—not mere ideal things to dream over sentimentally.

Life looks very short to the young when they first arouse themselves to consider it—eternity seems very near, and preparation for it a very important duty. God's calls to the young ever make a deep impression, and happy are they who listen to His voice, and yield their hearts to Him then, before the light of this world dazzles their eyes, and blunts their perception of unseen things.

God was calling Helen now, but she did not know it. She was conscious only of a shrinking dread—a vague, indefinable fear—an instinct that told her there was something wanting, and that all was not right within.

A young man came in at the gate, and sauntered leisurely towards her, but she did not notice his approach until he came near and his shadow fell upon her. She started to her feet then.

"Charlie, is that you? I did not hear you come in."

"No; you were fathoms deep in thought. What mighty problem were you trying to solve with that grave, serious face? Aunt Harriet has not been scolding you, has she?"

"Did I look serious? I was thinking over a very serious subject. I was thinking how short our life is—how, while we sit and dream, the hours are fleeting past, each one bringing us nearer to the grave, beyond which we cannot see."

He raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"What on earth has put such thoughts into your little head? I believe I can guess. I thought

I caught sight of a clerical wide-awake vanishing before me in the distance as I came. Mr. Seymour has been here, hasn't he?"

"Yes; he is in the house with Aunt Harriet now."

"Ah, I thought so! And he has been entertaining you with a dissertation on the shortness of life, I suppose. He might be more considerate than to introduce such gruesome topics in your presence, I think."

"He said nothing but what is perfectly true, Charlie."

"Oh, perhaps not! But I object to your being made miserable by such gloomy thoughts. You look pale and anxious, and altogether unlike your bright, sunny self. I don't thank Mr. Seymour to come and worry you in this way. Now, cheer up, Nellie; I can't bear to see a cloud on your pretty face!" And he came round, and threw himself on the grass at her feet.

He was a bright-looking, handsome fellow, this cousin of Helen's. Frank, open, and kind-hearted, he might have been a good and useful man, had he been blessed with a wise father. But Mr. Falconer was not a wise man. Per-

severing and ambitious, and beginning life with the advantage of a tolerable income, by the time he reached middle age he had amassed a very large fortune. Then he retired from business; built a handsome house, and furnished it luxuriously; surrounded himself with all the comforts his wealth could purchase; and sat down to enjoy himself among them.

He educated his children well; foolishly gratified every whim and caprice they chose to entertain, and then imagined he had done his duty. When a friend suggested that he should give his son a profession, he ridiculed the idea.

"The lad has no need to work," he said, "and he shall not enter the lists against those who have no other resource."

So the young man was doomed to waste the golden hours of his youth in idle pleasure, with no useful employment to develop his energies and call forth his ambition—permitted to plunge into dissipation without the restraining influence of some noble aim in life.

Oh, how fatally parents err sometimes! How they take their children's future into their hands, and arrange it to their own satisfaction, without

ever stopping to consider if they are acting for the best or not—without humbly and earnestly asking the great Ruler of all things to guide their decision for their children's good!

Charlie Falconer might have been a different man if he had had a different training. It said much for his goodness of disposition that he had not given way to any great excess, or fallen very deeply into sin. But he had grown indolent and careless, frivolous and thoughtless, his thoughts never rising above the trifles of his everyday life.

With all his faults, he was amiable and good-tempered, and had a peculiarly winning way that few people could resist. Helen liked him very much, and she looked down at him now with a smile, forgetting the thoughts that had caused her such uneasiness a little while before.

"You look tired after last night's dissipation," Charlie said. "I hope you enjoyed yourself."

"Very much," she replied; but somehow the recollection was hardly so pleasant as it had been half an hour before.

"I often wonder that Aunt Harriet does not interfere with your visiting at our house. She has no very exalted opinion of us, I know. I

don't believe she would venture beneath our roof herself for any earthly consideration."

"She never says anything against my coming."

"Well, I am grateful to her for that. As long as we are permitted the sunlight of your presence, we can cheerfully dispense with hers. She is a dolorous companion for you, Nellie. If it were not for the few hours we enjoy together, you would have a dull time of it, I fear. I don't know how you manage to get on; I should not like to live with her. I think it would spoil my appetite for dinner to have her grim face glowering at me across the table."

"She is never unkind to me."

"Perhaps not actually unkind, but her chronic moroseness and gloom are enough to throw any ordinarily constituted mind off its balance that comes very much in contact with her."

Helen looked hurt.

"Don't sneer at her, Charlie," she said. "With all her faults she is a very good woman."

"Oh, undoubtedly! Something in the style of that respectable Pharisee of old—'God, I thank Thee I am not as other men are. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess.'"

Oh, yes, Aunt Harriet is an eminently religious woman, but I don't like religious people. They always seem to regard you with a sort of pitying contempt, and if you venture on any innocent remark in their hearing, they transfix you with a look of pious horror, no doubt intended to strike terror to your guilty soul. Your aunt is one of this school of Christians, Nellie."

Helen made no reply. She liked her cousin, and they usually got on very well together, but this morning his sarcastic remarks grated on her ear, and annoyed her. He did not observe the grave look on her face, and he might have continued in the same strain for some time longer, but at this moment Miss Falconer and her visitor appeared at the cottage door.

"Ah, Aunt Harriet is showing her spiritual adviser out," he said, in a low tone. "How saintly they both look, don't they? How admirably they are suited to each other! Why don't they make a match of it? Nothing could be more desirable, I am sure, unless the gentleman is pledged to perpetual celibacy, like some of his persuasion."

The subject of his remarks here approached

them, and Charlie rose to his feet, and greeted him with a gracefully courteous and deferential manner, in curious contrast to his flippant speech. They were no strangers to each other. Mr. Seymour was the incumbent of St. Mark's, a church which had recently become famous for its gorgeous and elaborate ritual. The ornate style of its architecture, the beauty of its decorations, the bewildering display of lights and flowers, and the exquisite music, were the topic of conversation for miles round. All the fashionable people attended St. Mark's, and its services were always crowded to excess.

The Falconer family, of course, went among others, and so they knew Mr. Seymour well. But there was no sympathy or good-fellowship between them. There was nothing in common between the gay people of the world, and the grave, thoughtful vicar of St. Mark's.

He rarely visited at their house, except when he called to solicit aid for some charitable purpose, and then he never appealed in vain. Mr. Falconer always sent him away with a donation which was liberal even to ostentation.

He spoke to Charlie now in his genial, pleasant



way, but he did not linger. He had neither the time nor the inclination to loiter talking idle platitudes, and so after a few grave, quiet remarks he went away, and left the cousins to themselves. Charlie watched him away in silence, but when he was out of hearing he turned to Helen with a very earnest look.

"Keep aloof from that man as much as possible, Nellie," he said; "be on your guard, and do not let him gain an influence over you."

Helen laughed.

"Why, Charlie, he will not try to gain an influence over me!"

"Yes, he will," said Charlie, decidedly. "He knows that he has your aunt's countenance and approval, and he will seek to win you over to his own views, and subjugate your will to his. No good will come of it if you allow him to succeed: he will make you as strait-laced and self-righteous as Aunt Harriet herself."

Helen coloured with annoyance.

"I am much obliged to you for your kind solicitude," she said, coldly, "but I should be able to take care of myself, I hope."

"Are you angry with me, Nellie?"

"No," she returned briefly.

"I think you are. My dear cousin, I did not mean to offend you. I spoke with the best intentions, believe me. Tell me before I go that you forgive me!"

Helen could not resist his pleading tone; her brow cleared in an instant. Hers was not a disposition to cherish resentment, especially against Charlie, so she gave him her hand, with her usual sunny smile, and they parted the best friends imaginable.

## CHAPTER II.

"HELEN," said her aunt one morning at breakfast, "Mr. Seymour was speaking to me about you yesterday."

Helen looked up surprised.

"About me, aunt?"

"Yes. He wishes to know if you would not like to interest yourself in some branch of Christian labour. He thinks you are quite old enough now to arouse yourself and consider your own responsibilities in life. You have a good deal of leisure time, and he is sure you would be happier with some definite object in life—some active employment for the benefit of your fellow-creatures."

Helen looked at her aunt, but did not speak. Charlie's warning flashed across her mind, and she waited to hear what would follow.

"I have had it in my mind to speak to you on

this subject for some time," Miss Falconer went on, "and Mr. Seymour has decided me. You have been frittering your days away in a very useless and frivolous manner lately, and it is time that you turned your attention to the claims of religion. You should never let the vain pleasures of this world induce you to forget your duty to God and to your brethren. You may rely on receiving every help and encouragement in setting out in the path of duty. Mr. Seymour will give you his assistance and counsel, and will gladly receive you among his little band of earnest workers, if you will join them. My earnest advice and sympathy you may reckon on always, of course."

There was a moment's silence.

"Every one has not the vocation for a life of religious work that you have, aunt," Helen said presently.

"Perhaps not. It is not required of every one—it may not be required of you; but surely the thoughtless and self-indulgent life you are now leading will fit you for no useful position in the world. I want you to think this over, Helen. It is a subject that demands much serious and

prayerful consideration. Mr. Seymour will speak to you about it himself very soon. He will call in a day or two for that purpose."

In a day or two he did call. Miss Falconer had gone out, and Helen was just dressed to go to her uncle's, when the servant came to her room, and told her he was below. She went down to him at once.

"My aunt is not at home, Mr. Seymour," she said.

"It is of no consequence, Miss Hervey," he returned; "I called to-day to see you."

Helen looked surprised, but did not speak.

"I have a favour to ask of you," the clergyman went on. "Miss Bently, one of our Sunday-school teachers, is about to be married and leave the neighbourhood, and we shall require some one in her stead. Will you take her place?"

Helen shook her head.

"No; I would rather not," she said decidedly. "I have never been accustomed to anything of the kind, and I don't feel able to undertake such a task. I hope you will soon find some one more fitted for it than I am."

"Won't you try?" urged Mr. Seymour. "You

are young, and have few calls on your time; a little useful work will be good for you, I am sure. It is with regard to your own benefit as well as ours that I ask it."

"I am sorry to say no," said Helen.

"I am sorry to hear you say so. Your aunt has been an earnest labourer in our Lord's vineyard for many years, and I should like to see you following in her footsteps. The precious hours of your youth are flying quickly; will you let them pass unimproved—unhallowed by one redeeming act of charity? God has given you health and strength and time to work for Him, and He says to you now, 'Why standest thou here all the day idle?'"

Helen looked uneasy.

"I am very young, Mr. Seymour. In time, perhaps"——

"Ah, my child, how can you tell that time will be given you? How can you tell how soon the mandate may come forth—'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' God's Word says *now*, Helen. *To-day* if ye will hear His voice. Work while it is called *to-day*, for the night cometh when no man can work. O child, beware lest

the night come, and the shadows fall, while yet you sit with folded hands, your talents hidden in the earth! Beware lest the midnight cry—'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh,' awake you from your dream, only in time to find your lamp gone out, and the door closed against you!"

She looked up with a startled face, thrilled by his solemn words.

"I am so inexperienced, I don't see what I can do. At my age I cannot be expected to have the power of influencing others for good."

"You have the power if you have the will. The will is what is needed, Helen."

"But suppose the will is wanting?"

"Then you should seek for it, pray for it, my child. Forgive me; I must speak plainly to you. I do not think you would like to drift through life a mere votary of pleasure, with no higher ambition than the gratification of your own selfish passions. Should you?"

Helen looked troubled.

"I don't know—I have not thought about it. Life is very pleasant to me now, Mr. Seymour."

He looked down at her wistful face with infinite compassion in his kindly eyes.

"Yes, I know," he said, half sadly. "'Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.' I know just how you feel. I know how fascinating and alluring the pleasures of this world appear, when we are young, and have not yet discovered how false and hollow they are; but, believe me, the years are drawing nigh when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'"

"But that time has not yet arrived for me, and it seems hard that I may not enjoy life while I can, before the cares of this world come to blunt my sense of enjoyment."

"God does not say we must not enjoy our life, dear child. On the contrary, He says, '*Rejoice*, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.' That's the point, Helen. Let your pleasures be such as will bear the test of the last great day. There are higher, purer pleasures in life than you have found yet."



He rose from his seat as he concluded.

"I will not detain you longer now; I see you were just going out. Will you promise me before I go, to think of what I have said?"

She promised in a low, tremulous voice, and he saw by the solemn light in the large, dark, thoughtful eyes that she was deeply moved. He took her hand kindly.

"Believe me, I am sorry for you, my child. I see you feel the truth of what I have said in your inmost heart, and I know there is a struggle before you—a struggle between right and wrong—between good and evil. Many powerful foes are arrayed against you, but stand up boldly and manfully in His strength, and you must come off conqueror in the end."

He took his leave, and Helen went up to her own room. She did not go out as she had intended. Her soul was stirred to its inmost depths. The struggle which Mr. Seymour had predicted had already commenced, and a tempest of conflicting emotions swept over her. Passionate rebellious thoughts surged up in her heart, and she wept long and bitterly.

As the hours went by, the storm subsided, and

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she grew calmer; but when she went down to tea she was still pale, and her face bore traces of the agitation she had undergone. Miss Falconer saw it, but she made no remark. She had been told of Mr. Seymour's visit, and she guessed something of what had passed; but she thought it best to keep silence, and leave Helen to her own reflections, unless she herself introduced the subject.

But if Miss Falconer expected Helen to take her into her confidence she was disappointed. She kept her own counsel, and never alluded to her interview with Mr. Seymour, either then or afterwards.

## CHAPTER III.

THE summer glided swiftly by, and winter came once more. It had been a busy season to Helen—a season of unceasing bustle and gaiety. The long, bright, sunny days found her oftener at her uncle's house than at home. The young people, having nothing better to do, exhausted their ingenuity in ever devising some new plan for their own amusement. Picnics, excursions, boating-parties, lawn-tennis parties followed each other in rapid succession; and then came a month at the seaside, to recruit their wearied energies, which to Helen, who had never before seen the sea, seemed the best of all.

She had everything she could wish for. With plenty of money at her command (for Mr. Falconer had the management of her fortune, and supplied her with a liberal hand), sought after and admired for her natural sweetness and

amiability it might be asked what more could she require to make her happy.

And yet Helen was not happy. There was ever a yearning void in her heart that nothing ever seemed to fill. She threw herself into the tide of gaiety in the vain hope of finding happiness; but in the solitude of her aunt's quiet home she ever felt how shadowy and unreal was the phantom she was pursuing.

Her whole soul went out in passionate longing for something higher and better—something more lasting and real than the passing pleasures in which she sought oblivion and peace. Her days were passed in wild unrest. Looking forward to each new pleasure as a means of escape from herself, and then, the brief excitement over, recognising the emptiness and vanity of it all.

Swayed by every fitful emotion, she was like a ship on the ocean, without helm or anchor, at the mercy of the waves, threatening each moment to overwhelm it. Everything seemed to grow misty and unreal—the ground seemed slipping from beneath her feet. Awaking to the transitory and evanescent nature of all that she was clinging to, yet having nothing better to lay hold of,

shrinking in dread before the awful uncertainty of the future, she knew not what to do, or where to turn.

And ever as time went on, the shadows seemed to gather closer round her, and darkness and horror overshadowed her soul. True, there were times when she cast off her depression, and was as gay and light-hearted as ever; but it was only a fitful gaiety—a gleam of wintry sunlight across the darkness of her path, which was sure soon to be swallowed up in clouds again.

She often thought of Mr. Seymour's words. They were coming to pass already. Truly the days were drawing on apace when she could say, "I have no pleasure in them."

She rarely saw Mr. Seymour now. He called occasionally, but she was often from home; and if he did chance to meet with her, he spoke no more to her as he had done that day.

No one suspected what was going on in the girl's mind. Her aunt had no idea of it, and so she had to fight her battle alone. And none but those who have experienced it can imagine the sense of utter loneliness and isolation that overwhelmed her at times. None but those who

have felt it can tell how lonely and desolate we may be, even when we are surrounded by loving friends. Verily, the heart knoweth its own bitterness. In bodily pain and sickness we have the sweet, tender sympathy of those we love to comfort and help us; but in our mental trouble, when the soul is struggling in deep waters, we are alone. Not one understands us—not one pities us; and yet we have far greater need of comfort and consolation then than in times of bodily weakness.

Helen's young heart ached for sympathy, but there was none to give it, except the one great Sympathiser with all our sorrows, and she did not turn to Him.

So in alternate hopes and fears, struggles and longings, the summer passed away, and winter came.

It was Emily Falconer's birthday, and her father, ever ready to make a display of his wealth and importance, had issued invitations for a large party in her honour. Of course Helen was to be there, and as it would be late before they separated, it was arranged that she should remain at her uncle's all night.

She went, and to all appearance was the gayest there. Her beauty and unaffected manners made her the centre of attraction, and she knew it. She was not naturally vain, but all this adulation and flattery were producing their effect, and Helen was learning to take pleasure in them, in spite of the instincts of her better nature.

The festivities were at their height when a message came for Helen. She must return home at once—her aunt was very ill.

The news came upon her like a thunderbolt. All her brightness and gaiety were gone in a moment, and she turned with a sick heart from the revelry around, glad to escape from the mirth and merriment she had joined in so eagerly just before.

Mr. Falconer sent her away at once in his carriage, and Charlie, compassionating her white, distressed face, accompanied her. He left her at her aunt's door, however, and returned home, glad to forget, if he could, in the excitement of the hour, the very existence of such things as sickness and suffering and death.

The lower rooms of the cottage were all in darkness, but a servant met Helen with a light as she knocked softly.

"How is she?" inquired Helen.

"Very ill, Miss Helen," returned the girl.

"What is it?"

"It is a stroke of some kind. She was up in her room after tea when we heard her fall. We thought she was dead when we found her."

"You have sent for a doctor, of course?"

"Yes; he is with her now. Mary is there too."

Helen went upstairs at once.

On the threshold of the room she paused for a moment. There was a faint light burning, and the doctor and a maid-servant stood silently watching the stricken figure on the bed. Oh, what a contrast to the scene she had just left! There, lights and music, gay songs and joyous laughter—here, darkness and silence, sickness and perhaps death!

She advanced to the bedside, and looked down with awe at the changed face of her aunt. Helen had never in her life been brought face to face with death, but surely this must be death! The closed eyes, the rigid, drawn features, the awful pallor of the still face, shocked the girl to the very heart. She turned to the doctor.

"Is she dead?" she asked hoarsely.



"Not dead," he returned; "but very ill."

"Is there any hope?"

"I cannot speak decidedly yet. She may recover in time. She will never be herself again, probably. She may never again be able to leave her bed."

Never able to leave her bed! Helen shuddered, and sat down sick at heart. What an end to her life of self-denial! What a sudden and awful termination to her long career of usefulness! To be laid on a sick-bed never to rise again—to be forced to give up all the work in which she had taken such an interest, and pass the remainder of her days in weariness and suffering. It seemed a dreadful fate to Helen.

She sat still so long that the doctor turned to look at her, almost thinking that she had fallen asleep. But the wistful look that met his, told him she was too deeply moved for slumber. The mute anguish of the pale, weary young face touched him.

"You had better retire, young lady," he said.

"You look pale and tired, and in need of rest."

"How can I rest?" she said impetuously.

"You can at least lie down, and rest your

body. You must not exhaust yourself. If your aunt recovers, you have a long, wearisome task before you to nurse her back to health and strength again. You will be needed then—you can do nothing now if you remain. I shall stay here for the present, and if you are required you shall be called.”

Helen reluctantly withdrew.

As she moved across the room she caught sight of her own reflection in the looking-glass. How incongruous that radiant figure looked in the darkened chamber! What pains she had taken over her toilet only a few hours ago—how she had admired the effect of the delicate tints on her complexion, and now the very rustle of the rich robes over the carpet grated on her ear.

She went to her room and lay down, but she did not sleep. All the long night through her thoughts were busy. To think that death should have entered her home, while she was spending the hours in idle folly, and dreaming not of his approach! How awful to be stricken down in a moment by his unseen hand!

Influenced by her cousins, Helen had come to regard her aunt's strict religious opinions with a

kind of contempt; but it was a consolation to her now to remember that she had been a good woman, and was prepared for death. What if the sudden summons had come to herself, and she had been called, all unprepared, to appear before her Maker! After all God's calls to her—after all His Spirit's strivings, and the whisperings of conscience, what must her fate have been?

A feeling of horror came over her as she realised how frail her hold on life was—how uncertain the foundation on which her feet were resting, and how soon it might give way beneath her, and precipitate her into blackness of darkness for ever.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE next few weeks were long and dreary ones to Helen.

Miss Falconer did not die. For many days she hovered between life and death, but at length she rallied somewhat, and began to recover slowly. It was long, however, before she could speak, and longer still before she spoke at all connectedly.

Helen was her untiring and devoted nurse. Night and day she watched by her bedside, and could scarcely be persuaded to leave it, even to take necessary rest. As the invalid gradually awoke to consciousness, and strove in faint inarticulate murmurs to make known to them her wants, Helen was the one who understood her best, and seemed to divine her meaning before she could give it utterance. She anticipated every wish as far as she was able, and

waited on her aunt with a patience and thoughtfulness beyond her years.

Helen had no companion all those dreary weeks, and she wished for none. All the brightness seemed to have gone out of her life, and the hopes and dreams of youth quenched in deep gloom and darkness. The very shadow of death seemed to hang over her.

She wished to see nobody—the solitude and silence suited her troubled heart the best. Her uncle and aunt came to see the invalid, but Helen sat by the bedside as still and grave as ever, and said very little to them. Emily and Charlie sedulously kept away, not caring to come in contact with sickness and suffering.

Mr. Seymour called, of course, but he never stayed long, and took little notice of Helen, beyond speaking a few words of comfort and encouragement when he left; for she sat still and silent, never relaxing into tears, or betraying any emotion whatever.

It was not Mr. Seymour's fault that he misjudged her. How was he to know what was passing in the depths of that young heart, that had once so resolutely repelled his confidence?

Dr. Elliot understood the girl better. He saw the sorrowful light in the dark eyes, the pitiful compression of the lips; and some instinctive knowledge of her secret unrest came to him, though he gave no sign. He watched her with unconscious interest, for he felt that a struggle was going on within her soul that only God Himself could see and understand.

So the days passed by, and Miss Falconer was getting better, when one day Charlie Falconer and his sister called. The invalid was asleep when they came, and Helen went downstairs to them at once.

"You poor little creature!" said Emily, kissing her, "how haggard and worn you look! As soon as Aunt Harriet is better, you must come and stay with us for a while, and we must bring back the roses to these poor white cheeks. You must get out in the fresh air a little at once, or you will be ill."

Helen shook her head.

"I cannot be spared at present—my aunt needs all my care and attention. You need not be troubled about me—I am very well."

"But I am troubled," returned her cousin;

"and so is Charlie. Look at the dear fellow—how shocked he looks at the change in you."

"Shocked indeed!" said Charlie; "and strongly inclined to be angry. You must give up this close confinement at once, Helen. We cannot allow you to injure your health in this way. There are plenty of hired nurses to be had, and you must get one."

"Ah, Charlie, I cannot leave my aunt to the care of a hired nurse! She is used to me, and she would not like a stranger near her, I know."

"She must put up with it the best she can," said Charlie. "She has not been so kind and indulgent to you, Helen, that you should consider her comfort before your own health."

"She has been very good to me, Charlie, and I will not leave her now that she is helpless and ill. You are alarming yourself unnecessarily about me, I assure you."

"You are a dear, good girl to devote yourself so unselfishly to her," said Emily. "It must be very dull and unpleasant for you, accustomed as you are to society, to be cooped up in a sick-room with a peevish invalid."

"I have not felt it so, indeed," said Helen.

"How do you get on with Dr. Elliot?" inquired Emily. "Do you like him? Few people do, I think."

"Why should they dislike him?"

"Oh, because he is such a strange man—such a stiff, solemn, unbending personage. He never cares to make himself pleasant and agreeable to anybody."

"I see nothing disagreeable in him," said Helen. "He has been very kind and sympathetic to me."

Charlie looked at her keenly.

"Don't take it in your head to fall in love with him," he said lightly. "It will be all in vain if you do—your hopes will be blighted. The doctor is not a marrying man."

"Don't be too sure of that!" said his sister. "Sober, stern men like him often make fools of themselves at last; and Helen is pretty enough to turn even Dr. Elliot's wise head."

"Helen ought to feel highly flattered by your compliment," said Charlie.

"Don't mind him, Nellie; he is only jealous," said Emily, turning to her. "He can't bear the idea of anybody admiring you but himself. Now, Charlie, confess that you are jealous of Dr. Elliot."



"Jealous of that fellow, Emily! Give me credit for better sense! Why, he is forty at the least, and is hardly a person likely to take the fancy of a young girl like Nellie. He is a strange man, Nellie, as Emily says, and his family are all the same. They don't seem to care for society, although they would be well received anywhere, for they are in good circumstances. They are very strait-laced, religious people. I should think Dr. Elliot and your aunt get on well together, for their views would seem to be identical. You must have had a lively time lately between the two, with Mr. Seymour to make up a trio. No wonder you look pale and worn out, poor child!"


"Come for a drive with us, Nellie," interrupted Emily. "The carriage is waiting at the gate, and the fresh air will do you a world of good. Run upstairs, and put on your hat at once."

"No, thank you, Emily," said Helen; "I cannot go with you to-day."

And she adhered to her resolution. The united persuasions of the brother and sister failed to induce her to accompany them, and they left at last, half offended at her persistent refusal.

It was some time before Helen saw either of them again. The days wore on, each one shorter and darker as winter advanced, and Miss Falconer's health steadily improved. She had entirely lost the use of one side, but her intellect was as clear as ever, and she could converse freely with those around her. Dr. Elliot did not expect much more. He knew that she would never regain her wonted strength and activity, or for the future be anything more than a feeble, helpless invalid.

## CHAPTER V.

NE Sunday evening Helen and her aunt were together in the invalid's room. It was the last day of November—a dark, stormy evening, and they had just finished tea, when Miss Falconer called her niece to her side.

“What is the time, Helen?” she inquired.

“Nearly six, aunt.”

“Does it rain?”

Helen went to the window and looked out. It had rained the greater part of the day, but the wind had risen now, and the clouds were lifting.

“No, it does not rain,” said Helen; “it looks quite bright over the hills yonder.”

“Would you like to go to church, Helen?”

“And leave you, aunt?”

“Yes; Mary can come and sit with me while you are away. If you do not mind facing the wind, I should like you to go.”

"I am not afraid of the weather, Aunt Harriet, if you can spare me."

Miss Falconer drew her down to her, and kissed her.

"Go, then, dear; and don't forget to pray for me. I shall probably never again be privileged to enter God's house myself."

It was a wild night. At first Helen found the boisterous wind refreshing and exhilarating after her long confinement indoors, but soon its rude violence became almost too much for her enfeebled energies, and she could scarcely make way against it. She struggled on bravely, but she was very glad when she reached her destination, and could exchange the quiet calm of the church for the noise and tumult of the warring elements outside.

She felt weary and exhausted—too languid to join in the devotions, or to care for anything. The music seemed far away, and she heard the old familiar words like one in a dream, without comprehending their meaning.

Mr. Seymour was the preacher to-night, and as he entered the pulpit Helen sank back in her seat with a sigh of relief, and composed herself to listen.

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

These were the words that fell upon her ear. And then the preacher went on to speak of this gracious invitation,—how it came to those poor fishermen of Galilee—how it comes to each of us to-day.

In the hours of pleasure, in the hours of affliction, in the blaze of noonday, in the darkness of night. In the silence of the sick-chamber—by the bed of death. Whether we hear, or whether we forbear; whether we take the message to ourselves, or wilfully reject it.

All Helen's listlessness and carelessness vanished, and she listened with rapt attention as the preacher turned to the other side of the question.

“And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

Listened as he spoke of the different ways in which the invitation is received;—some hearing

and turning away in utter indifference; some plunging into the business or pleasures of life to escape from the whisperings of conscience; so few, so very few listening and humbly obeying. Ah, it touched Helen deeply here! She felt that she had turned a deaf ear to the Saviour's loving invitation. She felt how her past had been wasted, when it might have been spent in humbly following Him who had deigned to call her, and her cheek crimsoned with shame.

She went home, her heart beating with a new and strange emotion. She felt the invitation—nay, the command—she had listened to that night was indeed for her, and she resolved, by God's grace, to obey it. In the new light that had burst upon her, she realised how glorious a life of self-abnegation and devotion to Christ's cause must be; and before she slept that night, she prayed long and earnestly for help to follow Him humbly and faithfully all her life long.

A day or two after this, entering her aunt's room on returning from a short walk, Helen found Mr. Seymour there. She was glad to see him. In her altered state of mind his very face seemed changed. How true and noble he looked!

How earnest was the glance of his keen grey eye—how kindly the clasp of his hand!

"Helen has been out for a walk," said her aunt. "I insisted on her going, for she has never been out of the house since I was taken ill, except to church on Sunday evening, and I am sure she needs a little exercise."

"She needs the fresh air too," said Mr. Seymour. "She looks pale."

"Yes. She has been very good to me, Mr. Seymour, during my illness. I don't know what I should have done without her. Night and day she was ever at my side to supply me with what I needed. Now that I am better I must not let her confine herself so closely. I must not be a greater burden than I can help; for I shall never be anything more than a burden, I suppose, for the rest of my life."

And she sighed deeply.

"Try to bear your trial with patience," said Mr. Seymour gently. "God would not have sent it if it had not been needed. I know it is hard for one who has been accustomed to an active life to lie still and suffer; but He who sends the cross will help you to bear it."

"It is not myself that I think of," said Miss Falconer. "Who will do my work now? Who will care for those whom it has been my duty and privilege to care for hitherto? That is the thought which troubles me."

"Do not let it trouble you," said the clergyman. "Leave it in the hands of God; He will take care of His suffering children, and raise up another to take your place, now that your work is done."

Helen looked up, and her face flushed.

"Aunt Harriet, can *I* do anything to supply your place?" she asked.

"Are you willing to try, my dear?"

"Yes, I will do anything I can. I am young and inexperienced, but I may do a little, perhaps, if Mr. Seymour will tell me how."

They both looked at her earnestly.

"You may do a great deal, Helen, if you will; and it will be a great comfort and happiness to me. I shall be at rest if I know that my work is not being neglected; I shall not mind my own sufferings then."

Mr. Seymour said nothing, but his searching glance rested on the girl's flushed face for a moment. When he left he called her out of the



room after him, and they went down to the drawing-room together.

He took her hand gently.

"So the light has come at last, my child," he said.

"I hope so, Mr. Seymour."

"Ah, I knew it would. I knew you would grow weary of the empty pleasures of this life, and long for something better and nobler. You feel that God is calling you to a higher life than this?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

"I am very glad, Helen. My prayers for you are answered."

His tender tone touched her deeply.

"How kind you are, Mr. Seymour, and how little I deserve your kindness! I have been very stubborn and wilful. I have resisted God's calls, and turned a deaf ear to His warning voice; and when you spoke to me so earnestly and faithfully, I gave no heed to what you said, although I felt the truth of your words."

"But that is all past now. You mean to dedicate the future to His service, do you not?"

"Yes; by His grace, I do."

"Ah, you will need His grace! The world has many snares. You yourself know how alluring its transient pleasures are."

"But, Mr. Seymour, you surely do not suppose that these passing things can ever charm me more!"

"Ah, child, you have not yet gauged the weakness of your own heart. Do not imagine that because you have turned your back on the old life, and resolved to begin a new one, your path is all smooth before you. God says, 'My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy heart for temptation.' The Christian life is one of continual warfare—of constant conflict—of vigilant watchfulness and unceasing prayer. Foes stand thick around on every side—the world, the flesh, and Satan strive for the mastery; and never while he lives can the Christian soldier lay down his sword and say, 'I have conquered.'"

Helen listened undaunted. In her new-born enthusiasm and earnestness of purpose, she felt strong to endure. What was a lifetime of struggles compared with an eternity of bliss? Surely the reward was worth striving for, let the difficulties in the way be as many as they may!

“The path of duty has ever been a difficult and thorny road,” Mr. Seymour went on. “You know what our Lord says: ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’ The cross has been the common lot of all Christ’s true followers, and you must not expect to escape it. But take comfort: ‘He will not suffer you to be tempted beyond that you are able;’ He will not lay a heavier burden upon you than you are able to bear. Pray to Him, Helen; pray for grace to follow Him faithfully; and remember that though the road may be difficult and thorny, He will give you strength to tread it, and in due time we shall reap, if we faint not. God bless you, my child, and bring you safe home to His kingdom at last.”

## CHAPTER VI.

FROM that day a new life dawned for Helen. With all the ardent enthusiasm of her young, impulsive nature she set herself to work. She saw how miserably the past had been wasted—how many opportunities for good she had allowed to slip by unheeded, and she resolved that the future should be different.

She never allowed a single day—a single hour to pass, without striving to improve it in some way. It became the study of her life how she could best be of service to her fellow-creatures. The words were ever in her mind—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." And she earnestly longed to do something, even if it were only for one of the least of Christ's brethren.

Into the homes of the poor and destitute she went, carrying with her what she thought they

needed; and the humble cottages were the brighter for her presence. Many a sorrowing one was cheered by her loving, tender sympathy—many a humble heart gladdened by her unostentatious charity. She turned away from no scene of suffering—no abode of poverty—no deathbed where she could carry comfort or relief.

At first her fastidious, refined sensibilities shrank from the squalor and dirt and disease among which she daily found herself; but she strove with all her might to conquer the repugnance that she felt ashamed of. These poor degraded creatures were Christ's brethren, and that was enough for Helen.

As she grew accustomed to the work, she began to find a pleasure in it. A few months before she would have thought it impossible for her to tolerate such a life; but she was really more at rest now than she had been then, in the midst of all her gaiety, tormented by the upbraidings of conscience.

Her labours took her much from home, and Miss Falconer was necessarily left a good deal alone. But she did not complain; on the contrary, she preferred to have it so. If she felt lonely it was

only necessary for her to remember that Helen was doing the work she had lost the power to do, and she was reconciled to her solitude at once.

When Helen expressed any regret at leaving her, she invariably answered her in a cheerful tone.

"I shall be happier so, my dear," she would say. "If I must remain a mere useless idler for the rest of my life, I need not be the means of hindering others from working."

Helen saw nothing of her cousins now. She was anxious to keep out of their way, for the present at least. She felt intuitively that they would disapprove of the change that had taken place in her, and unconsciously she shrank from facing their remonstrances—perhaps even their ridicule. It was surprising to her that she had been able to keep aloof from them so long; but she knew that, sooner or later, there must come a meeting between them, and one day, all unexpectedly at last, it came.

Helen was standing at the window of the little drawing-room with her hat in her hand, having just returned home, when she saw the elegant, graceful figure of Charlie Falconer coming up towards the house. A flush rose to her cheek, and her heart

beat rapidly; but the sudden compression of her lips, and the resolute look in her eyes, told that she was prepared to stand firm against any persuasion that might be brought to bear upon her.

Charlie greeted her with his usual gay good-humour.

"My dear little cousin, how pleasant it is to see your pretty face again!" he said. "You have grown quite a stranger of late, and you have no conception how we miss you. In the short time you have been with us, you have found your way into the hearts of us all, you little witch! We are all waiting very impatiently for Aunt Harriet's recovery, that we may see you among us once more. Is she better, Nellie?"

"She is very much better. She is able now to leave her bed, and be lifted to a sofa. Will you go up and see her?"

"No, thank you—she won't care to see me. She and I are not kindred spirits, you know. Besides, I never could endure the gloomy atmosphere of a sick-room. But I am glad to hear she is better for your sake, for you must need rest and relaxation. And that reminds me of what I came for. The Assembly ball at S—— comes



"You have grown too *religious* to come! You have grown too good to mingle with sinful mortals like us. Is that it?"—P. 57.





off shortly, and we are all thinking of going. Will you accompany us?"

"No, thank you, Charlie."

"Why not? Do you think Aunt Harriet selfish enough to disapprove of your going out, just for an hour or two?"

"I don't think she would like me to go there, if she were asked; but I don't intend to ask her."

"You don't intend to come, then?"

"No."

"Once again, why not? Don't you feel well enough to bear the excitement? You look pale."

"I am very well, Charlie. It is not that."

"What is it, then?"

Helen was silent.

"You have grown too *religious* to come! You have grown too good to mingle with sinful mortals like us. Is that it?"

The indignant blood rushed to her cheek, and an angry retort was on her lips, but by a strong effort she repressed it, and the flush died away, leaving her very pale.

"I do not think it right to waste the precious hours God has given us in gaiety and idle folly," she said as calmly as possible.

"You prefer to spend them in contemplating and imitating the numberless perfections of Mr. Seymour and Dr. Elliot!"

The tears came at his tone.

"How can you speak to me so, Charlie?" she said.

His heart smote him when he saw her distress.

"Forgive me, Nellie, but I love you, and you know it, and it maddens me to see these people gaining such an influence over you, and alienating your heart from me. Dear Nellie, cast aside these stupid notions, and come to the ball with me."

"I cannot, Charlie. I have learned to see the emptiness of such pleasures, and I hope and pray that you will one day see it too."

"I hope not. This world is pleasant enough for me."

"Ah, but it passes away, Charlie!"

"Ay, that's the worst of it. But let us make the most of it while it lasts."

"Is it worth while, for the sake of a few fleeting hours of pleasure, to lose an eternity of bliss? Be life as bright as it may, death soon comes to end it all."

"You little nun, you talk as if you were eighty

instead of eighteen. Time enough to think of death when old age comes. I am good for sixty years to come, at least."

"Ah, you cannot reckon upon a day. You are well and strong and full of life now, but to-morrow may find you—where, Charlie?"

He tried to laugh, but her solemn words awed him in spite of himself.

"The lugubrious tone in which you ask the question shows your opinion about it. It is clear you consider me a reprobate, only fit to be cast into outer darkness. How people may deceive themselves! I always flattered myself that you were rather inclined to think favourably of me, but it seems I was mistaken. I wonder if, the Reverend Ernest Seymour has had anything to do with it! It seems rather hard, after all our friendship, that a fellow like that should be allowed to prejudice you against me."

"He has never attempted to prejudice me against you. He has never even mentioned your name to me."

"No? Then it must be his superior attractions that have gained him the preference. Your sex is proverbially fickle, Nellie, but I thought better

of you than that you would throw me overboard—so soon as this, at any rate.”

“I don’t know why you should assume that tone to me, Charlie. I always liked you, and do still. My affection for you has undergone no change, although our hopes and purposes in life may have ceased to be the same.”

“Then if you care for me, give up these people, and be my own dear little cousin once more. They are spoiling you, Nellie. They are a set of narrow-minded bigots, and they are seeking to make you like themselves. I hate religious people, Nellie, and I tell you plainly, that if you persist in identifying yourself with such people, all friendship between us must come to an end.”

She looked at his resolute face sorrowfully.

“I did not expect this from you, Charlie; I had hoped better things of you. I had hoped the day might come when you would learn to understand and sympathise with me.”

“Ah, you hoped to win me over to your views and ideas, did you? What a very weak-minded person you must think me! You will not find me so yielding a proselyte as you expected.”

There was a moment's pause, and then he resumed—

"Well, my fair cousin, I see that you are determined to go on in your own way; and as your way seems to lie so very far apart from mine, perhaps we had better separate altogether. Shall we shake hands, and say good-bye?"

"I think it will be best," she replied; and her lip quivered.

"Remember, you make your own choice. I love you, and I believe you care for me a little; but if you take up these views, we can be nothing to each other. I could never marry a sanctimonious, *religious* woman!"

"Then you will never marry me, Charlie."

Her heart was aching bitterly, but her voice, though sad, was firm. She did care for this bright, handsome cousin, who had been such a companion to her in the past, but she saw how different they were—how utterly opposed their opinions and ideas, and she felt it was better to part. No thought of yielding to him crossed her mind. She stood firm to her own convictions, but it was hard to let him depart in anger, and know that all was at an end between them.

He too felt it deeply, for he really loved his cousin. In all his life he had rarely known a wish ungratified, and here he stood face to face with opposition that he could not overcome. But he was passionate and proud, and his cold, stern face showed little of his inward pain.

"Must it be good-bye, then?" he asked calmly.


"Yes; good-bye, dear Charlie, good-bye," and her voice faltered.

He touched the hand she extended coldly, and turned away, his heart throbbing with passionate, rebellious pain.

"O Charlie, do not cherish enmity against me! Try to think as kindly of me as you can, for I am earnestly trying to do right, believe me!"

"They say that virtue is its own reward," he returned bitterly; "and in that case you will be amply repaid for any trifling pain our separation may cause you. I am sorry, for your own sake, to find you so infatuated; but you must take your own way, of course. We shall miss you a little at first, no doubt; but we shall soon get used to it. Good-bye, Miss Hervey, and I hope you will never repent the choice you have made to-day."

## CHAPTER VII.

LL through the cold, dreary days of winter Helen struggled bravely on in the path she had marked out for herself. Undeterred by cold or wet, and regardless of her own personal comfort, she pursued her labours, and prayed—oh, how earnestly!—for God's help that she might continue them faithfully.

For it was not so easy as she had thought when she commenced. As time went on, and the novelty wore off, the work grew irksome to her. At first, too, she found a sort of comfort in prayer, and in the study of God's Word, but in time a change came over her. When, touched by a sense of God's forbearance and goodness, she had vowed to dedicate her life to Him, no misgiving entered her mind of her being able to fulfil her promise. She felt strong and self-



reliant, and able to endure anything for Him who had endured so much for her.

She mapped out her time day by day, rigorously determined that none should be spent in idleness or self-indulgence, but that all should be given to God, and His service. Certain hours she devoted to visiting the sick and poor, others to waiting upon and reading to her invalid aunt—all her leisure she spent in private meditation and prayer.

She gave herself no rest; and by and by the constant strain upon her energies began to have its effect. She grew restless and depressed, nervous and irritable. Whole legions of evil passions that she had never dreamt of possessing, started up to harass and torment her, and the continual struggle with these unseen, and until now unsuspected, enemies troubled her spirit and overwhelmed her with despondency.

She began to understand now Mr. Seymour's meaning when he had spoken of the Christian life as a warfare. She had begun the fight and she found herself face to face with foes within and without, the number and strength of which filled her with dismay.

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## My's Change.

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fair a structure as she may, it must one day fall, because it had no foundation.

And yet she felt that something was wrong. She felt deeply the weakness and sinfulness of her own heart, but saw no way of escape—no refuge to fly to in her infirmity and helplessness.

No thought of giving up and discontinuing the struggle crossed her mind. Disheartened and almost despairing as she was, she still hoped and prayed and persevered, steadfast in her purpose of redeeming the wasted past.

Redeeming the past! Ah, how could she hope by any works of hers to redeem one misspent hour? No wonder she grew wearied and discouraged with such a gigantic—such a hopeless task before her!

The trial was all the harder to bear because it had to be borne in silence. All troubles are lighter if we are blest with human sympathy, but the girl's secret was locked within her own breast, and her whole heart ached with a sense of loneliness.

Ah, she did not know that her Heavenly Father's eye was fixed upon her in love, and His compassionate heart yearning over His weary, sin-laden child!

But human eyes were watching her too, and a kindly human heart was full of pity for her. Dr. Elliot, coming from time to time, saw how day by day the young face grew paler, and the slender form more fragile; and one day he spoke to her aunt on the subject.

"Have you ever noticed how ill your niece is looking?" he inquired.

"It has occurred to me several times that she is thinner and paler than she used to be. You have remarked it too, then?"

"I have seen it for some time. Her health is visibly declining. I fear she has overtaxed her strength lately."

"Yes," said her aunt regretfully; "she has been unwearying in her attention to me throughout my illness. They tell me that for some time she scarcely ever left my side, night or day. No wonder it has been too much for her strength, poor girl!"

At this moment Helen entered the room.

"Dr. Elliot was just speaking of you, Helen," said her aunt. "He thinks that you are looking ill. Come here, and let me look at you, child."

Helen came and stood before her.

"Yes, you are certainly right, Dr. Elliot. She has grown pale and thin."

Helen spoke hastily.

"Indeed, aunt, I am very well," she hastily said.

"You don't feel very strong, I know," said the doctor. "You need change of air and scene : the close confinement of the past few months has been too much for you."

Helen made no reply to this, and he said no more, but he did not forget her. He felt anxious to help her if he could, without appearing offensively obtrusive, and he turned the subject over in his mind as he pursued his calling.

"Mother," he said one day, as he was leaving home on a round of visits, "you have heard me speak of Miss Falconer, have you not?"

"Yes, frequently, my boy."

"I wish you would call on her some day ; she would be glad to see you, I know."

"Do you think she would ? I shall be glad to call if you really believe it will give her any pleasure."

"She is a confirmed invalid, you know, unable to leave her room, and, of course, is very much alone. I am sure a sight of your dear, pleasant

face would do her good. But it is not altogether on her account that I wish you to go. She has a niece living with her that I should like you to know. I think you could help and comfort her if you could only win her confidence. I am sure she is very unhappy, and needs a loving, sympathising friend."

"Is she in spiritual darkness, Robert?"

"I believe she is in one sense, mother. I think I understand how it is with her. She is earnestly seeking the true light, but she is in great perplexity and doubt. She is 'going about to establish her own righteousness, and has not submitted herself to the righteousness of God.'"

"Ah, I see, poor child! If I can help her in any way, I shall be very glad."

"I think you may help her, mother. She is all in the dark as yet—you may perhaps guide her towards the true light."

"I will call upon Miss Falconer at once," said Mrs. Elliot, "and if I can get the poor girl here, Lucy may help and enlighten her better than I can."

The next day she fulfilled her promise and called at the cottage.

Miss Falconer was surprised at the visit, for they were not even acquainted; but a kindly face, though it might be a strange one, was very welcome to the lonely invalid.

"We are strangers to each other, Miss Falconer," said her visitor, in a cheerful, pleasant way; "but my son has told me of your affliction, and I thought I might perhaps help to cheer a solitary hour, if you care to have me. Robert assured me that you would be glad of a little company, and so I am here."

"You are very kind," said Miss Falconer, "and so is Dr. Elliot. I cannot help feeling lonely sometimes, although my niece is very kind and attentive to me."

"Ah, your niece! My son has told me of her too. Is she quite well? I shall have the pleasure of seeing her, I hope?"

"Oh yes, Helen will be in shortly. She is not very well, I think; Dr. Elliot says she is far from strong. I fear I have been a great trouble and anxiety to her lately; but perhaps the trial was needed. I think it has had an effect upon her. It seems to me she is growing more sober and thoughtful every day."

Shortly afterwards Helen came in. She looked worn and weary, and replied to Mrs. Elliot's cordial salutation languidly.

Then she sat down, and Mrs. Elliot had leisure to observe her. She noted the sombre, brooding look in the dark eyes, the grave expression of face, the nervous, restless movement of the delicate hands, and her kind, motherly heart warmed to the desolate girl at once.

"I wish you would come and see us, Miss Hervey," she said. "My Lucy would be so glad to know you. She is a helpless invalid, poor girl, and is therefore in a great measure shut out from the society of the young."

"An invalid!" repeated Miss Falconer, interested at once. "How sad! What is her complaint, Mrs. Elliot?"

"She has suffered from spinal disease for many years, and recently she has given decided indications of consumption also. She has been a great sufferer, and a friend like Miss Hervey would be a comfort to her. Will you come and see her?" she asked, turning to Helen.

"I rarely go out anywhere, Mrs. Elliot—I don't feel much inclined for society."



"But you should go out a little. You are very quiet here, and too much confinement and solitude is not good for the young. Change of scene and pleasant society would strengthen and refresh you, and enable you better to discharge your duties at home."

Helen made no reply, and the subject dropped for a time, but when she rose to leave Mrs. Elliot reverted to it.

"May we hope to see you some day?" she asked, as she shook hands with Helen.


The girl hesitated for a moment. It flashed across her mind what Charlie had once said about Dr. Elliot and his family being such strictly religious people, and she felt she should like to go and see what they were like at home. Perhaps she might learn something from them.

She looked at her aunt inquiringly.

"Go, my dear, by all means, if you wish," said Miss Falconer.

And Helen promised to go, greatly to Mrs. Elliot's satisfaction. She had taken an interest in the girl, and she was now as anxious to help her as Dr. Elliot himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

BOUT a week afterwards, when Dr. Elliot called as usual, he brought a letter for Helen.

“It is from my sister,” he said. “She is very anxious to know you, Miss Hervey. She has few friends, and her sad affliction debars her from many little enjoyments natural to her age. You will be a mutual help and comfort to each other, I think.”

Helen opened the letter and read it. It was a graceful little note, in a ladylike handwriting, begging Helen to come and spend the following afternoon with her and her mother. Helen went to her own room, and wrote a reply accepting the invitation.

“Ah, this is Lucy’s answer, is it?” said Dr. Elliot, when she gave it to him. “It is not a refusal, I hope?”

"You are very good, Dr. Elliot. No, it is not a refusal."

Helen went the next day.

The house in which the Elliots lived was over a mile from Miss Falconer's, and quite at the other end of the little town. It stood at a considerable distance from the road, with a pretty lawn in front of it. It was a large house, situated on rising ground, and commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country. Helen paused to admire the prospect as she walked up the smooth grass to the house, and thought what a beautiful, peaceful spot it was.

But if the outside appearance was pretty, she found the interior equally charming. There was no attempt at display—no grandeur, but an air of elegant simplicity and real comfort pervaded the whole. It was a *home* in which Helen found herself—the home of people of taste and refinement; and a happy home, too, to all outward appearance.

Mrs. Elliot received Helen in her calm genial way, courteous and pleasant without being extravagantly effusive. She was really glad to see the young girl, and she made her feel it.

But Lucy ! Helen had expected to find a pale, feeble invalid, fretful and complaining, and she found herself face to face with the loveliest girl she had ever seen.

A bright, happy face—fragile and delicate-looking, it is true, but with a faint rose-tint on the cheeks that relieved its pallor ; clear, beautiful eyes, and a winning smile that lit up the fair face like sunshine—this was Lucy Elliot.

She welcomed Helen in a sweet, musical voice, and with the same genuine, unaffected cordiality that characterised her mother. Helen was taken altogether by surprise, and for a moment she hardly knew what to say. She had come prepared to sympathise with the girl before her, but she found her occupation gone. There was no need of sympathy here—no need of consolation. Helen found it difficult to realise that she was an invalid at all, as she lay there on her pretty sofa, looking so calm and contented.

The room itself was in keeping with her bright beauty—light and cheerful and elegantly furnished. Loving hands had arranged it with a view to the invalid's comfort, and nothing that could amuse or give her pleasure had been forgotten.

Her sofa stood before a large French window, from which she could look out on the green fields and distant hills, and the trees clothed in their fresh spring verdure. Choice flowers bloomed all around her, and a freshly-cut bouquet stood on a little table by her side.

"I have brought you some flowers," said Helen, "but I see you do not need them. You have plenty already."

"Oh, but I cannot have too many, and these are so beautiful! How kind of you to remember me! Mamma, we will have them on the tea-table, if you will put them in water. I love flowers, Miss Hervey, and they keep me always supplied with them. Robert never fails to bring me a bouquet when he comes in to dinner. I assure you I should think something serious was the matter if he forgot it." And she laughed gaily.

Her cheerfulness had a subtle charm for Helen. She found it very pleasant to be here. After the gloom and loneliness of her life at home, the society of refined and agreeable people was indeed delightful.

The pleasant chat over the tea-table was a surprise to her. Remembering what Charlie had

said about this family, it was so different from what she had expected—so different from her aunt's stern, severe, unbending gravity.

And yet there was no levity. It was only the calm serenity of those at peace with God and with each other.

After tea Mrs. Elliot withdrew to attend to some household duties, and the two girls were left alone.

"It is so pleasant to have you here," said Lucy, looking at her guest. "I hope you will come frequently, now you know us. I should like you for a friend. I felt attracted to you the first moment I saw you."

"I am sure the attraction was mutual," said Helen. "I suppose there is a certain sympathy between those of the same age and sex."

"Of the same age!" repeated Lucy, smiling. "We are hardly that, are we?"

"I don't know. I should not suppose there is very much difference in our ages."

Lucy looked amused.

"How old do you suppose I am?" she asked.

"I can't guess—one and twenty, perhaps."

"You are not one and twenty?"

"Oh no, I am not nineteen yet."

"And I am thirty!" said Lucy, with a musical laugh.

Helen was amazed.

"You don't look more than twenty," she said.

It was true—she did not. The fair smooth skin, the broad open brow, the innocent child-like look in the blue eyes, all tended to give her a youthful appearance.

"I assure you that I entered on my thirty-first year a month ago," said Lucy. "Robert is five years older than I—he is thirty-five."

"He looks much older than you," said Helen.

"Ah, he has so much to do—so much to think of—so much care and anxiety in connection with his profession! He may well look older than I do, who have always had such a smooth, peaceful, happy life!"

"Happy!" repeated Helen.

"Yes, very happy!" said Lucy emphatically.

"Why not?"

"I should think yours a very sad life. If I were in your position, I think I could not help repining."

"Why should I make myself and those around

me miserable, and dishonour God by murmuring and complaining, when I know He only chastens me in love? When He has surrounded me with all the comforts of this life, why should I repine because He has seen fit to withhold from me the blessings of health and strength? He knows what is best for me, my dear. He is all tenderness and compassion, and He has some wise purpose in afflicting me, though I do not know it yet."

Helen sighed.

"I wish I were as happy as you are! Before I saw you, I pitied you—I have more need to envy you now."

"We cannot help being happy if we will only trust to our Heavenly Father—trust implicitly in His goodness and love. I think my very helplessness and dependence upon Him—my need of a strong arm to lean upon, makes it easier for me to trust and cling to Him, than it is for those who are strong and well, and like to feel they are able to do something for themselves. It seems to me, too, that there is a closer, deeper tie between God and His suffering children than the rest of the world. I think no one in health can ever quite



know what rest—what rapture it is, in the hours of pain and bodily weakness, to feel God so near—so very near! A comforter, a helper, a sympathiser, a friend; a strength in the midst of weakness, a solace in the midst of woe! How sweet to bear the cross laid on us by His loving hand—how sweet to feel He shares it, and lightens its weight! You call my life a sad one! Ah, my dear, you do not know how full of joy and peace it is!”

Helen was silent. This beautiful faith and patience—this unquestioning, un murmuring resignation, was beyond her comprehension. There was something here which she knew nothing of—some secret wellspring of happiness to which she was a stranger.

“Then I am so rich in human love and sympathy,” Lucy went on. “How precious are my mother’s tenderness and care—my brother’s love and devotion! How they study my every comfort, and anticipate my every wish. Surely I should be ungrateful if I wearied them with useless sighing and lamentations over my lot! I have not long to remain with them: while I am here, I can at least repay their loving care by showing

that their efforts to make me happy are successful."

"Then have you no hope of some day being stronger and better?"

"Not in this world. On the contrary, I know that I am passing away. They have not told me so, but I know that each season as it comes finds me feebler and weaker, and the end must come before long."

The quiet, cheerful tone in which she spoke astonished Helen.

"How calmly you speak!" she said. "Have you no fear of death?"

"Ah, no! Death is but the beginning of a new and better life, you know. 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'"

"But it seems so hard to die in your youth, and leave those you love so dearly."

"Oh, not hard to leave even them to go to be with Christ! 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, *neither shall there be any more pain!*' Ah, child, you do not know so well

as I do what pain is, or you would not think it hard to go where it can never come! But how garrulous I have become about myself!—no doubt you are weary of the whole subject. Will you sing for me? I am passionately fond of music.”

Helen rose and went to the piano.

“What shall I sing?” she asked.

Lucy looked up with a bright smile.

“Jerusalem the Golden,” she said. “Do you sing that?”

“Oh, yes!” Helen replied, and commenced.

She had a sweet voice, rich and powerful, and she sang the grand old hymn as Lucy had never heard it before. The conversation they had just had together gave a deeper meaning to the sublime words, and Helen’s voice thrilled with emotion as she sang.

She had only just commenced when Dr. Elliot entered the room quietly, and came to his sister’s side. He did not speak, but stood leaning on the back of Lucy’s sofa in silence, watching the brightness of her face, as she lay drinking in the sweet music with delight. Even when the singer had concluded, neither spoke for a moment.

Helen came back to the window, and after a

word or two to Dr. Elliot, stood still, looking out at the fair prospect.

The evening sun shone brightly on the distant hills, and lighted up the valley with its golden splendour. Not very far away a winding river lay glittering in its beams, and the meadows on its banks blazed with the yellow glory of the mayflowers.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Helen.

"Very beautiful!" said Lucy; and then, as her eyes rested dreamily on the lovely scene before her, she began repeating, in a low, musing tone—

"O God! Oh, good beyond compare!  
If thus Thy meaner works are fair!  
If thus Thy bounties gild the span  
Of ruined earth and sinful man,  
How glorious must the mansions be  
Where Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee!"

"It is hard for the mind to conceive anything more beautiful than some of the fair scenes of Nature," said Helen. "How lovely that green valley looks, with the wooded hills rising in the background, and the golden sun flooding the whole with glory! Can heaven be more beautiful?"

Dr. Elliot spoke softly.

“‘And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. . . . And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him.’”

“‘And they shall see His face!’” said Lucy, clasping her hands with a rapt, ecstatic look.

As she glanced up at her brother, he met her gaze with an answering smile, and his eyes flashed with a bright radiance that positively transfigured his grave face for a moment.

Helen looked at them both in silence. How real these unseen things appeared to them—how joyful their anticipation of them! She could not look forward with delight to the joys of heaven as they seemed to do. It was indeed the world “within the veil” to Helen, and she shrank from the thought of the mystery which surrounds it, and the dark valley which leads to it. What was this strange, mysterious sympathy between these two, in which she had no share?

She felt almost inclined to ask, and she might have done so had she been alone with Lucy; but Dr. Elliot's presence restrained her, and she had

no other opportunity, for Mrs. Elliot now returned, and shortly afterwards supper was served.

It was a pleasant little meal, and Helen enjoyed it thoroughly. Lucy's sofa was wheeled up to a corner of the table, close to her brother's side, and she joined in the conversation with her usual bright cheerfulness.

It was a pretty sight to see this little family together. They were so happy in each other's society—so united—so loving. Mrs. Elliot and her son watched over the invalid with such tender solicitude, and anticipated her wants with such loving forethought, that Helen could no longer wonder at her speaking of them in terms of gratitude and affection.

Helen was so much interested in observing their mutual affection, that she forgot the flight of time, until the gathering shadows startled her. Then she rose hastily to her feet.

"It is growing dark," she said. "How quickly the time has passed! I had no idea it was so late."

Lucy laughed.

"If the time has passed so quickly, it must have passed pleasantly," she said; "and in that

case we shall hope to see you again soon. Promise me that you will come!"

Helen promised. She felt that she should like to see more of this gentle girl—that she should like to sit at her feet, and learn something of those hidden truths that gave her such rest and peace.

As Helen bent over her to say good night, Lucy drew her down and kissed her.

"Come again soon," she said once more, and once more Helen promised.

As it was growing late Dr. Elliot insisted on accompanying Helen, and during the quiet walk home in the calm of the evening, she talked to him on the subject that was uppermost in her mind.

"What a sweet disposition your sister has," she remarked. "How happy she seems to be in spite of her affliction!"

"Yes, she is a dear girl. Her unquestioning submission to the will of God is very touching. Even in her hours of deepest suffering—and she does suffer severely sometimes—you never hear a murmur escape her lips."

"It seems strange that one so good and pure

and lovely should be permitted to suffer so," Helen said.

He looked at her with a smile.

"'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,'" he said; and again his eyes flashed with the glad light Helen had seen in them before. "Lucy is one of Christ's own beloved ones, and though He does permit her to suffer for a while, it will not be for long. Soon—sometimes I think very soon—He will call her to join the countless multitude before His Throne, who have come out of deep tribulation."

Helen sighed.

"It seems to me it would be worth while to bear even her affliction, heavy as it may be, only to experience her calm peace, and possess her firm hope for the future," she said.

"God knows what is best for His children," said the doctor, "and He orders their life accordingly. The same discipline may not be needful for one as for another; but surely we have all the same hope to cling to—the same blessed home to look forward to, if we will!"

But Helen did not understand. She felt that she should like to change places with the happy



Lucy—she felt that she could bear any bodily pain, if she had but a heart at rest.

Is it not ever so? Do not weary, sin-sick souls ever feel that they could endure any trial—bear any privation—suffer any loss, if they could only find the way to heaven at last? And yet the way lies open before them, if they could only see. No suffering or sacrifice on their part is demanded or desired, and still they blindly hope and long and yearn, and still refuse to take what is offered them freely. It is only when they give up all thought of *purchasing* eternal happiness, by suffering or otherwise, that the light breaks in upon their soul, and they see God's pardoning love in all its fulness.

Dr. Elliot felt where Helen's mistake was, and he wished from his heart that he could set her right. As they parted at Miss Falconer's gate, he said—

“You spoke just now of being willing to suffer, Miss Hervey, but remember there is no *merit* in suffering itself, be it borne as patiently as it may. Lucy's patience and sweet resignation will never win her a place in that bright home to which she is looking forward so confidently, and she knows

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it. She has a surer ground than that to rest upon,—‘Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’”

He shook hands with her, and then left her to her own thoughts. But her eyes were holden, and she could not see the truth. God might reveal it to her in His own good time, but the veil was over her heart yet, and all was mystery and darkness.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE Falconer family were not at all pleased at the estrangement which had arisen between themselves and Helen Hervey. Having all grown attached to the young girl, they liked to have her with them, and it was not agreeable to them to give up the pleasure her society afforded them. They were too much accustomed to having their own desires gratified to bear contradiction at all patiently. They were all annoyed at the girl's persistent avoidance of them, and resented it accordingly.

What had passed between her and Charlie at their last interview none of the family knew, for Charlie had kept his own counsel on the subject; but they saw clearly that Helen was determined to withdraw herself from their companionship.

And so in time she was seldom spoken of among them. Charlie seemed to dislike to hear

her name, and as they had a strong suspicion that he cared more for her than he chose to show, they left him alone, and mentioned her no more.

But one day after dinner Mr. Falconer unexpectedly broke the silence that had been so rigorously observed.

"I met with Helen Hervey on my way home this afternoon," he observed, "and I hardly knew the child. It is perfectly incredible how she has changed."

"In what way?" inquired his wife; and Emily looked up from her work to listen.

"Why, she has lost all her pretty colour, and looks as fragile and delicate as if she were in a consumption. Her old bright gaiety seems all gone, and she looks as grave and serious as Harriet herself. They are killing the girl among them."

"Where did you see her?" asked Emily.

"She was coming out of a cottage not very far from her home—a squalid, miserable hole that she had no business near, I am sure. She had been in to see a sick person, she told me. She'll catch a fever at some of those low places, one of these days, if she is not more careful. I don't

believe she is well at all now. I was struck with the languid, listless way in which she moved."

"She spoke to you, you say?" said Mrs. Falconer.

"Oh, yes; and inquired after you all. I said, 'You never come to see us now;' and she replied, 'No,' and looked troubled. I could not help saying, 'Whenever you feel inclined to come, child, there is a welcome for you, remember.' I am really sorry for her—she seems so desolate and lonely. We know what sort of companion Harriet is for her; and since she has imbibed these notions, she seems to have few others."

There was silence for a time—all seemed uneasy. Mrs. Falconer looked anxiously and irresolutely at her son, who lay back in an easy-chair reading. He had not even raised his eyes from his book during the foregoing conversation, but his mother felt sure that he had heard all that had been said.

"We must try what can be done," she said at last. "Charlie, you are her favourite—won't you go and see her, and persuade her to come among us once more?"

"No," said Charlie briefly but decidedly.

"Why not? You hear what your father says. It seems a pity that she should be left to herself in this way."

"Oh, she is all right!" said Charlie. "You need not trouble yourself about her. She does not trouble herself about you, I know."

"Then won't you go?"

"No, I certainly will not go."

"How hard and stern you are, Charlie!" said his sister. "I wonder what Helen has done to make you so bitter against her! Poor girl! I am sorry for her. Mamma, I will go and see her if you like. You have no objection to *my* going, I suppose, Charlie?"

"I shall not attempt to interfere with you; you can do as you like, of course. At the same time, I should advise you to let her alone. She does not want you, depend upon it. She would rather be allowed to go on her own way undisturbed. She is a strong-minded young lady, and superior to the weaknesses of the rest of her sex."

"Charlie, I am ashamed of you! Poor Helen, I wonder what she would think if she could hear you! She was always fond of you, Charlie."

"It looks like it, certainly!" said Charlie bitterly, without looking up.

"Well, I shall go," said Emily. "If I fail to bring about a reconciliation between us, I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have tried."

Emily set off on her mission the very next day.

When she arrived at the cottage she found Helen sitting alone, idle for a wonder, her hands folded on her lap, her head resting wearily against the cushions of her chair. She was thinking how inexpressibly dreary her life had become—how all the dreams and anticipations of youth had faded away, leaving her utterly hopeless and desolate in the spring-time of her days. Looking back to the past, how bright and happy it seemed to her now; looking forward to the future, how dark and gloomy it appeared. She shrank from the thought of the long years before her, to be spent in the discharge of duties which gave her neither comfort nor pleasure.

She looked up as her cousin entered, and her whole face lighted up with pleasure.

"Dear Nellie," said Emily, coming forward quickly, and kneeling down beside her, "don't

be angry with me for coming ! I could not stay away any longer ; I wanted to see you so much. Will you let me kiss you ? ”

Helen threw her arms round her, and kissed her repeatedly.

“ I am very glad to see you, Emily,” she said.

“ Are you ? Are you really glad I have come ? I was afraid you would not be pleased. Dear Nellie, how is it we have drifted apart so of late ? We used to be so happy together.”

Helen did not reply, but she held her cousin's hand, and kissed her again.

“ I don't know what is the cause of this miserable estrangement between us,” Emily went on, “ but it must cease. We can none of us bear it longer. You would hardly credit how we all miss you. As for Charlie, poor fellow, he is not like the same. He has grown so moody and irritable that he is a positive nuisance sometimes, and I know it is only because he is separated from you. And you don't look as if you had been very happy lately. Do you know what I have come for, Nellie ? ”

“ No.”



"I am here to ask you if you will come and see us again as you used to do."

Helen's face flushed. She longed to see them all again, and she asked herself why she should not go. Why should she shut herself out from all human love and tenderness, and weary herself in vain efforts after a peace which she could not obtain? Even Dr. Elliot had said she needed relaxation and society, and she felt that he was right. She felt her strength failing her. While she deliberated with herself, the wish to see her friends again every moment grew stronger, and it was plain, even to Emily, that her resolution was giving way.

"Do say you will come, dear. It will make us so happy. Charlie will be overjoyed."

The colour rose again to Helen's pale cheek.

"Does he know of your coming?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Oh, yes; I wanted him to come himself, but you refused him last time, and Charlie is too proud to run the risk of a second denial. At the same time, he longs to see you, I know. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will come some day, Emily."

"We have a small dinner-party to-morrow, and there are several people coming that you know. Come to-morrow, Nellie."

Helen drew back.

"No," she said hastily, "not then. I will come some evening when you are quite alone and quiet; I only want to see you—I don't wish to meet a number of strangers."

"Very well," said Emily, "it shall be as you like. When shall we expect you? Shall I let you know some day when we are alone?"

"Yes, if you please."

Emily was delighted at the result of her visit—it was more than she had expected. Charlie had discouraged her from the first, and she was afraid that he knew his cousin best, and would prove right; so she had not been very sanguine of success.

She went upstairs with Helen to see her aunt in high good-humour. In common with her family she disliked Miss Falconer; but to-day she chatted to her pleasantly, and laughed, and made herself very agreeable indeed.

Two days after there came a summons for Helen to go to her uncle's the same evening; and

she went. She shrank a little from the meeting, fearing their ridicule, and dreading rather to meet Charlie.

But she found it better than she expected. The family were in the drawing-room after dinner when she arrived; Mr. Falconer dozing in an easy-chair, his wife looking over the newspaper he had just dropped, Emily at the piano, and Charlie stretched idly on a sofa by the open window.

As she entered they all gathered round her, and welcomed her warmly, except Charlie. He did not speak a word; but when she turned to him, he took her hand and held it for a moment in a close, silent pressure, and then quietly drew her down to a seat beside him on the sofa.

Charlie was too proud to show his feelings, but he was very glad to see her. Accustomed to have everything his own way, he could not brook disappointment in the dearest wish of his heart, and he had chafed like a spoiled child at their separation. Chafed because his conscience told him that she was right and he was wrong; and down deep in his heart he felt that there were higher aims in life than to eat, drink, and be

merry. But he put the thought aside, and preferred to consider himself ill-used by Helen's obstinacy.

Helen, on her part, found it very pleasant to be among them all once more; and to do them justice, they all strove to make it as agreeable to her as possible. They made no allusion to the past, but chatted gaily and unconcernedly on different topics, until the evening began to close in, and it was time for Helen to think of returning home.

"I must not be late," she said. "My aunt will sit up until I return. I always assist in getting her to bed."

"Surely the servants can manage without you," said her uncle. "You make a perfect slave of yourself, Nellie, and I fear you are injuring your health by it. You look pale and ill."

"So they tell me," replied Helen; "but I am really very well."

"We are all going to Scarborough very soon," Mr. Falconer went on, "and you must come with us. A month at the seaside will bring your strength and colour back."

Helen shook her head.

"You are very kind, uncle," she said; "but I cannot go with you."

"Oh, yes, you can! Your aunt will be willing to part with you for the sake of your health, I am sure. I shall come one of these days and ask her."

Helen looked up startled.

"Oh, no, please don't ask her; I would rather not go, indeed! You need not be alarmed about me—I shall not be ill. I have been over-exerting myself lately, and I want rest and quiet. I don't feel fit for the noise and bustle of a crowded watering-place."

That was not Helen's real reason, though. She felt that a month in the society of these worldly people, sharing in their occupations and amusements, would wean her thoughts from heavenly things, and perhaps put an end to her religious impressions altogether. Her uncle had some suspicion of the truth.

"That is not the reason why you won't go. The fact is, you object to our society."

"O uncle, don't be angry with me! Indeed I am grateful to you for your kind interest in me, and I would do anything that I could to please you, but my mind is made up on this point. I cannot go with you to Scarborough."

"You will not, you mean!" said her uncle sharply.

Her rebellious spirit rose at his tone.

"I will not, then," she said, compressing her lips, "if you prefer the word!"

"You are the most ridiculous girl I ever met with," said Mr. Falconer angrily. "Your aunt has made a perfect fool of you! She has instilled her own absurd notions into your head, until you are only fit for a lunatic asylum."

The indignant blood rushed to her cheek, but she made no answer. Her head drooped, though, and the tears fell fast. It was hard to be censured and misjudged like this, when she was only trying to act according to her conscience!

She could not speak or look up, but she felt her uncle's angry glance was upon her. Mr. Falconer was about to speak again, when Charlie came unexpectedly to the rescue, and interrupted him.

"Let her alone!" he said. "It is not very kind of you, I think, to ask her to come, and then begin to scold her. If you don't approve of her ideas, you can at least be silent, and let her enjoy them in peace. Don't cry, Nellie," he added, taking her hand reassuringly; "you shall

not be interfered with by anybody. You shall not be forced to Scarborough or anywhere else against your will. You are free to do as you choose; and if it gives you any pleasure to visit us, you shall come and go when and how you please, and we shall always be glad to see you."

His kind tone touched her deeply. His unlooked-for championship took her by surprise, and for a time she could only weep in silence.

"My father did not mean to distress you," continued Charlie. "He spoke hastily, but he would not willingly wound you for the world, I am sure."

Mr. Falconer's face softened.

"I did not mean to hurt the child's feelings," he said; "and I am sorry if I have done so; but I could not help speaking as I did. I hope she will do me the justice to believe that I only spoke for her good. Come, wipe your eyes, and forget all about it."

But Helen could not quite do that. She tried hard to regain her composure, but she was ill at ease, and she was glad that it was time to return home, that she might escape from the curious eyes of those who she felt could neither understand nor sympathise with her.

## CHAPTER X.

“**W**HAT possessed you to take Helen’s part as you did last night ?” inquired Mr. Falconer of his son at breakfast the next morning. “You have always seemed more intolerant of her folly than any one else, yet, directly I began to reason with her, you went over to her side in a moment. The truth is, you are in love with the girl, and she can wind you round her finger, in spite of your better judgment.”

Charlie looked annoyed.

“I happen to have a little more discernment than you appear to possess,” he said, “and I saw plainly that you were going the wrong way to work. Harshness will not avail in this case. Helen is self-willed, and impatient of control, and will not submit to coercion ; but at the same time she is a good-natured, affectionate little creature, and



may be won over to anything by persuasion. You will do no good by harsh words ; you may frighten her away from us altogether perhaps, but you will never induce her to give up her opinions by that means."

Mr. Falconer looked doubtful.

"Do you think not ?" he said.

"I am sure not," returned Charlie. "I have tried it myself, and I know."

"But what are we to do ? We can't let the girl go on as she is doing without an effort to prevent it."

"Use every effort you can, but in a different way. I am as anxious as you can be to root out these notions of hers, but it is a more difficult task than you suppose. If it is done, it must be the work of time, and it must be done gradually and imperceptibly. She must be allowed to do just as she likes—to come here just when she pleases, and nothing must be said or done to shock her fastidious sensibilities in the least. Little by little we may gain an influence over her. By and by a friend or two may drop in when she is here—accidentally, of course ; and so by degrees we may win her back to her old brightness and gaiety."

His father looked searchingly at him.

"You seem to have given the subject your closest consideration," he said. "I had no idea you could be so much in earnest about anything."

"I am in earnest," said Charlie; "and you have yet to learn how very much in earnest I can be when my heart is set upon anything."

"Is your heart set upon Helen, then?" asked his sister quickly. "O Charlie, that's the secret of your being so cross and disagreeable of late, is it?"

He looked at her with a half smile, and coloured a little, but said nothing.

"Well, boy," said Mr. Falconer, "if you really care for your cousin, I see no objection to your marrying her, provided we can reason her out of these preposterous ideas of hers. If it can't be done, of course the thing is out of the question."

"Quite," said Charlie firmly. "I told her so myself."

"Ah, you did? Then she knows what she has to expect. Well, lad, yours is rather a peculiar love affair, but I hope it will turn out all right in the end. You may reckon on our earnest co-operation, of course."

The Falconers carried out the arrangement

they had made to the letter. Determined not to lose sight of Helen again, they followed her up diligently, but were careful not to let their opinions clash with hers on any point. They sought her out, and strove, by the utmost kindness and affection, to win her confidence.

For a while she kept apart from them as much as possible, resolutely declining to visit them at all, except when they were alone; but as time wore on, she was more frequently to be seen in their society. Gradually, in spite of herself, she was included in first one little impromptu social party, and then another. It was all done so kindly, and with such a generous consideration for her health, that it was hard to refuse.

Helen could not bear to appear ungrateful, and she shrank from again incurring their displeasure. So she allowed herself to drift back into the tide of idle gaiety and pleasure that she had vowed to abandon for ever.

In her quiet hours at home she struggled and prayed for strength to cast off the thralldom of the world, and to resist temptation, but when the temptation was renewed she was all powerless to fight against it, and so it overcame her.

Contending emotions struggled for the mastery within her. She felt irresistibly drawn towards these things that she once dreamed had lost all charm for her; she tried to turn away from them, but she failed.

Poor Helen! She was trusting in herself—how could she hope to win the victory? While she prayed for help she was all the while depending upon her own strength—how could she do other than fail?

The pleasant company of her lively cousins was such a relief from the dark, gloomy hours she spent at home, occupied in religious duties that seemed to be of no comfort or avail to her. And so in time, as her friends followed her up perseveringly, she grew weary of resistance, and gave herself up to their will.

After all, what did it matter? she thought hopelessly. She had tried earnestly to serve God; but, although He had promised help and guidance to all who did try, He had vouchsafed no help to her. She could not be a Christian—what was the use trying any longer? Why not go back to the old life again, and be happy while she might?

Ah, she did not know the manifold ways in which God leads His children! How for a while He leaves them to themselves, and when in their proud self-confidence they think to walk alone, He suffers them to fall, only to teach them how frail and weak and sinful they are, and to lead them to Him for strength.

Helen was learning a hard lesson, but a lesson that we all must learn sooner or later, if we would hope to call ourselves God's children. Helen little thought that He who tries the hearts and reins was working within her, and emptying her of self by showing her how sinful and weak she was.

Day by day she seemed drifting farther from Him, and into the embraces of the world again. She still continued at intervals her visits among the poor and suffering, but there was no interest in the work, and she was glad when it was over.

She still knelt down to pray at night, but her prayers were merely a cold effort of the will—not the earnest outpouring of the heart; and she felt within her soul what an empty mockery they were.

Her Bible, when she opened it, seemed full of

solemn admonitions and awful warnings; and by and by it was opened less and less frequently, and finally was laid aside altogether.

She did not go to see Lucy Elliot again. She could not think of her patience and happiness without a pang, and she tried to forget her very existence. Even Dr. Elliot she shrank from, and avoided whenever she could, slipping away to her own room when he called, and remaining there until he had left the house.

And so, in alternate despondency and feverish gaiety, another summer glided away, and found Helen no nearer the rest and peace she longed for. It was not to be found in the haunts of idle pleasure-seekers—Helen had learned that long ago; and yet she eagerly sought for happiness in the passing enjoyments of the hour, and ever sought in vain.

## CHAPTER XI.

**H**ELEN rose very early one bright morning in September. She was going to a picnic with her cousins and a large party of young people they had invited to accompany them, and as she had much to do, it was necessary to be stirring betimes.

First she had to assist her aunt to dress ; and this was a work of time, for she was very helpless. Then there was breakfast, and afterwards her own toilet to make ; and she had promised to be ready by half-past ten, when her uncle's carriage was to call for her.

She hurried through her duties as quickly as she could, for she did not wish to vex her friends by keeping them waiting ; but she was not quite ready when the carriage arrived, in spite of her haste. She was nearly half an hour late, and her fingers trembled as she hurriedly finished dress-

ing; but she was ready at last, and was running lightly down to the garden gate when she came face to face with Mr. Seymour.

"Good morning, Miss Hervey," he said. "You are going out, I see."

"Yes," said Helen, confused a little; "they are waiting for me. I am rather in a hurry this morning."

He turned and walked back with her. He had recognised the carriage standing at the gate, and he guessed who it was that was waiting for her. He had seen her in her cousin's company much more than he liked of late, and he determined to give her a word of advice on the subject.

"I hope you will have a pleasant day," he said. "I like to see the young happy in any innocent amusement, but I fear your cousins are hardly fit companions for you, my child. They are frivolous, worldly people, and they will draw your heart away from God if you do not take heed. Never let them do that, Helen."

She did not reply, but her head drooped beneath his glance, and a guilty pang shot through her heart.

"Dear child, stand steadfast in the faith," said



the clergyman tenderly, as he assisted her into the carriage. "Do not let go your hold of heavenly things for the sake of a few hours of pleasure, which at best are but fleeting and transitory. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

He closed the door and turned away, and Helen was borne rapidly in the direction of her uncle's house.

But she carried with her a heavy heart. Mr. Seymour's words had struck deep down into her very soul, and she buried her face in her hands in mute anguish.

Ah, she knew he was right! She knew what power these worldly friends of hers had over her, and she knew, too, that she was submitting to their influence, and suffering herself to be led away from God. She asked herself what the end of it would be, and shuddered as she realised the awful uncertainty of her position.

She tried to banish the gloomy thoughts that weighed her down, and remove all traces of emotion from her face, lest she should excite the curious comments of her friends; but before she had thoroughly composed herself, she arrived at

her uncle's, where a large party was assembled, and numerous vehicles and saddle horses were standing waiting.

She was the last arrival, and her appearance was the signal for their departure, so they immediately set off—Helen in the carriage with her uncle, aunt, and Emily, Charlie on horseback.

Their destination was some miles away—a lovely sylvan spot on the banks of a river, and a favourite resort of pleasure-seekers during the summer months.

When the Falconers took a thing in hand, they spared neither expense nor trouble to ensure a success, and they had exerted themselves to the utmost to render this day a pleasant and happy one. Under the cool shade of the trees a tempting repast was spread out upon the grass, and the proceedings of the day commenced with due attention to the inner man. Then there were boats on the river for those who cared for a row; music for those who chose to dance; and the inevitable croquet to amuse the votaries of that interesting pastime. Everybody's tastes had been considered. Wines and lemonade were circulated freely; lively badinage and gay laughter rang

out over the water; and all seemed enjoying themselves to their hearts' content.

But all could not make Helen happy. She tried to join in the amusements, and appear as light-hearted as the others; but a dull pain lay heavy at her heart all day. Mr. Seymour's solemn question ever rang in her ears, and try as she may, she could not shut it out. Above the merry voices, the joyous laughter, she still heard the words—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The burden grew intolerable, and she longed to be away from all this noisy revelry, and free to give way to the emotions that tortured her.

"Helen," said Charlie, throwing himself on the grass beside her, as she sat alone and apart under the shadow of a tree, "are you not well? You look pale and out of sorts, somehow. Is the heat too much for you?"

The heat was indeed intense, and Helen was almost overpowered by it; but it was not that which gave the cold pallor to her face—it was the sick aching of her heart.

"It is very hot," she said. "I shall be glad when the day is over."

"You have over-exerted yourself," said Charlie. "Sit still for a while and rest. Shall I hunt up somebody who can sing, and get up an impromptu concert for your benefit?"

"No, thank you, Charlie; I would rather be quiet if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind in the least! I am perfectly happy anywhere, if I am only near you."

"Perfectly happy," repeated Helen, looking down at him sadly. "There is no such thing as perfect happiness in this world. Nothing seems worth living for."

Charlie laughed.

"Plenty of things seem worth living for to me. This sort of thing, for instance, is tolerably agreeable on the whole. Have you an attack of the blues, Nellie? Let me fetch you a glass of wine, and see if life won't wear a rosier aspect after that. You are a cup too low, I think."

Helen shook her head.

"No," she said; and her voice faltered.

Charlie looked at her anxiously.

"Dear Nellie, what is the matter?" he asked.

His affectionate tone touched her deeply; she could not bear it. She had suffered in silence

until now, but at the first word of sympathy her fortitude forsook her, and she broke down. She put her hands before her face, and burst into tears. Charlie rose and looked at her aghast.

"For Heaven's sake, Nellie, stop crying!" he said hastily. "Don't let any of these people find you like this! Here, let me take you away under the shadow of yonder trees. I hear somebody not far off, and there will be no end of a fuss if they come upon us now!"

He drew her away in the direction he had indicated. He was dreadfully afraid of being found in such a situation, and half inclined to be angry with Helen for her weakness; but his real affection for her made him more patient with her than he would otherwise have been. Under the shadow of the trees he paused, and stood watching her in silence.

He felt that there was something here beyond his help or sympathy—something too deep for any words of his to touch, and he allowed her to weep unrestrainedly. It was not until she grew calmer that he spoke.

"Shall we walk on a little farther into the wood?" he asked in a low voice, "and give you

time to recover yourself before we join the others? We may be intruded upon here."

Helen looked up at him timidly.

"If you please, Charlie."

She was afraid of him—afraid of his cynical sarcasm.

But Charlie could not sneer at her now. He saw how real her distress was, and he could no more have ridiculed her emotion than he could have struck her a physical blow.

He drew her hand through his arm, and they walked on slowly in silence. At length she spoke.

"You are very good to me—very patient and considerate with me, Charlie!"

He smiled.

"You dear little creature! how can any one be otherwise to you?"

"It is good of you not to make fun of me."

"I could hardly do that, Nellie. I love you too well to make fun of you when you are in trouble. I don't pretend to understand you, but I can see you are really unhappy; and if I cannot relieve you, I certainly would not add to your distress."

"I am deeply grateful to you, believe me!"

"Then will you show your gratitude by trying to shake off this nervous depression, and join in the amusements with the rest of us? Tea must be ready by this time, I think—shall we go and see?"

"Oh, not yet!" she said appealingly.

"To please *me*, Nellie!"


She could not resist his pleading tone. She turned at once, and accompanied him back to where the tea was set out on the grass, and the whole party were gathered, making merry over the boiling of the tea-kettle.

"Don't let them see anything is wrong," said Charlie. "Try to appear the same as usual."

Helen did try. She did her best to join in the lively conversation that went on over the meal, and to Charlie's satisfaction, nobody seemed to notice anything unusual in her manner. The outburst of tears had somewhat relieved her overcharged heart, and she felt calmer than she had done all day. Charlie exerted himself untiringly to amuse her, and with better success than he had hoped for.

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough, and Helen gave her cousin no more cause for anxiety.

## CHAPTER XII.

S the shadows began to lengthen the party commenced making preparations for their return. They were to wind up the evening with supper and a dance at Mr. Falconer's house, so they did not care to stay out very late.

As in the morning, Helen rode in her uncle's carriage, and Charlie on horseback; but he watched her anxiously, and persisted in keeping much closer to the carriage than his spirited horse liked.

"Mind what you are doing!" said his father, eyeing the restive animal. "Black Prince seems very nervous and irritable this evening."

Charlie laughed.

"Don't you think me able to manage him?" he asked.

"I don't know. If he were to take fright it might be anything but pleasant for you, besides



frightening the ladies out of their senses. Do be careful, Charlie!"

"Oh, I'll be careful—you need not alarm yourself about me. Black Prince and I understand each other very well."

"Uncle," said Helen suddenly, after they had gone some distance in silence, "I wish you would drive round past my aunt's, and set me down there. It is not much farther, is it?"

Mr. Falconer looked surprised.

"Oh, you must not leave us yet! You must come home with us and finish out the day's pleasure. All the young men are looking forward to a dance with you, and it won't do to disappoint them."

"I would rather go home, uncle, if you will excuse me."

"But we won't excuse you!" put in Emily. "Why do you want to leave us?"

"I am tired, Emily."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Falconer. "Charlie, do you hear what this foolish child wants to do? You can't spare her, can you? Tell her it is quite out of the question for her to wish it."

Charlie looked gravely down into the wistful face turned up to his own.

"She looks tired," he said. "She shall go home, of course, if she would rather do so. Would you really prefer it, Nellie?"

"Yes," she replied, with a grateful glance.

"Then we will drive round and put you down at home."

"How you spoil her!" said his father, half annoyed. "You allow her to have her own way in everything!"

"Certainly!" said Charlie; "she shall always have her own way as far as I am concerned. John, drive round by the new road, and set Miss Hervey down at home, will you?"

So Charlie carried the day, and Helen was permitted to leave them as she wished.

She was not expected at home for hours yet, and the servant who answered the door started with surprise when she saw her.

"Is it you, Miss Helen?" she said. "You are back early. Is anything the matter?"

"No, Mary, nothing is the matter. Is my aunt gone to bed?"

"No; it is not quite her time yet. Dr. Elliot is upstairs with her."

Helen was about to go upstairs herself, but at

these words, she changed her mind, and turned into the drawing-room instead.

The girl followed her to the door.

"Shall I leave you the light, Miss Helen?" she asked, for the room was in darkness.

"Yes," said Helen; "for I shall not go upstairs yet. My aunt does not require me, if Dr. Elliot is with her. I am tired, and will sit here and rest a while."

She sat down at the table, and leaned her head wearily on her hand. She did not wish to meet Dr. Elliot. She always avoided him when she could, and to-night she felt that she could not bear to meet his grave, searching eyes.

And now in the silence and solitude the burden that had lain heavy on her heart all day, returned with tenfold weight, and became almost more than she could bear. The solemn question that had haunted her unceasingly since morning rang in her brain still. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What if, after all, death should overtake her while yet she was clinging to these trifling earthly things, and her life should set in endless gloom!

A dreadful darkness seemed closing in upon her soul, shutting out light and hope and joy for ever. There seemed no help for her either in heaven or earth, and in utter despair and desolation she vainly wished she had never been born.

Dr. Elliot came downstairs while she sat there, and attracted by the light, glanced through the half-open door, and saw her.

For a moment he stood still, arrested by the unspeakable anguish of the fair young face. She did not hear him. His light step fell noiselessly on the soft carpet; and seeing he was not observed, he moved quietly away in silence.

But with his hand on the outer door, he paused again. He was an earnest Christian—a devoted servant of the Master he followed, and his heart was ever full of sympathy for those in sorrow and distress. He could not go away and leave that young creature to bear her load of sorrow alone, without one effort to relieve and comfort her. For a moment he hesitated, fearful of offending her by intruding upon her at such a time, and utterly at a loss to know how he could help her; but the look of suffering he had seen on her face recurred to him, and he turned back, with an inward prayer.

Knocking gently to attract her attention, he entered the room.

She sprang to her feet, and turned to him with a look of surprise. She was inclined to resent his intrusion, he saw, but he took no notice; if he could only comfort and help her he was willing to brave her displeasure.

"You have returned, I see, Miss Hervey," he said.

"Yes," she replied briefly.

"You are back early. Have you had a pleasant day?"

"No," she returned in the same cold, curt tone, "I have had a miserable day!"

"I am sorry for that," he said very gently. "How is it?"

Helen had meant to be cold and reserved, but the tender sympathy of his tone broke down the barrier of pride, and her self-control broke down with it.

"Ah, how is it? I don't know!" she said impetuously. "Dr. Elliot, how is it that nothing seems to give one any real happiness? How is it that while one seeks and longs for peace there is ever a yearning in the heart for something we do

not possess? Is life all made up of hopeless longing after the unattainable? Is there nothing beyond all this weariness and unrest?"

"You know there is, Miss Hervey. You know there is God beyond. Only God Himself can satisfy man's yearning aspirations. If God does not occupy the heart, there will ever be an aching void there—if He reigns within, there must be peace—peace which nothing in this world can take away."

"I know your sister has some mysterious source of happiness which I know nothing of," said Helen.

"God has bestowed it upon her—He will bestow it upon you, if you ask Him."

Helen hesitated for a moment. In her womanly delicacy she shrank from laying bare her heart to a stranger, and one of the opposite sex. But the weight on her mind was too great to be borne any longer in silence, and she longed in her loneliness for a word of human sympathy and help. She knew Dr. Elliot was a good man, and would not abuse her confidence; and so the long pent-up sorrow of her heart came in passionate words to her lips.

"Dr. Elliot, you may think me a careless, thoughtless girl, with no thought beyond my own self-indulgence, but indeed it is not so!"

"I know it is not so," he said.

"I saw the emptiness of all these earthly pleasures long ago," she went on passionately, "and sought for a higher, more enduring happiness. I prayed for it, but God did not hear my prayers. I saw that I was pursuing a dangerous path, and I strove to turn out of it, and tread the narrow way that leads to life. But it was all in vain! God did not help me, and I could do nothing alone. If you only knew how I have tried!"

"Tried to do what? Tried to make yourself worthy to enter that Holy Place where nothing that defileth ever can enter? Ah, you will never do that, child! It is a hopeless task."

"I know it," she said despondently. "I tried until I grew weary—I hoped and prayed and struggled; and ever as I strove, the evil seemed to grow stronger within me, and I found myself unable to cope with the sinful passions of my nature. At last I gave up trying to do so. I know the weakness of my own heart, but I am powerless to

change it; I am utterly helpless, and nothing remains for me, I think, but hopelessness and despair!"

She turned away, and covered her face with her hands. He stood looking at her in silent compassion. In that passionate cry of the heart realising its own sinfulness and weakness—in her despondency and despair he saw that she was not far from the Kingdom. The impassioned words of the Apostle came to his mind:

"For I know that in me dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

"Ah, child, you cannot see!" he said gently. "You have been seeking by your own works to propitiate an offended God, and you do not see that God loves you, that Christ has died for you, and that heaven is open to you, if you will only trust in His atoning sacrifice!"

"But what can I do? I am so weak and helpless."



"It is not a question of *your* strength, but of *His*. 'For while we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.' Do you believe that He died for you?"

She looked up surprised.

"Yes, certainly I do," she said.

He smiled.

"Then why don't you accept His offered mercy? Why do you stand aloof, troubling yourself and making yourself unhappy while Christ is waiting to bless you? 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,' He says. Do not keep Him waiting any longer."

She looked at him steadfastly, her colour rising, her lips parted.

"There is really no barrier between you and your God but your own unbelief. He loves you, Miss Hervey."

"Can I dare to believe it?" she said softly. "It seems too good to be true! If it is indeed true, what a blind ungrateful creature I have been all my life!"

"Ah, Miss Hervey, we all see that when we see how great His love has been. I must go now," he added, taking her hand. "God bless you, and



“In her own room she knelt down, and tried to think it over. Yes, it was true—she felt it. Christ had been seeking her all these weary months.”  
—P. 131.



give you grace to grasp the truth to-night. I have seen for some time that you were in trouble, and I pitied you from my heart, for I guessed what it was your life lacked to give it joy and brightness. I felt that I could not speak to you myself, but I trusted that in His own time God would reveal Himself to you, and I hope that time is not far distant now."

Helen went to her own room when he was gone, a host of strange emotions agitating her.

The light was truly breaking in upon her soul at last—a light so glorious that at first she shrank from it in fear and wonder.

In her own room she knelt down, and tried to think it over. Yes, it was true—she felt it. Christ had been seeking her all these weary months, offering her His full and free salvation, and she had gone on in her own way, blindly and wilfully rejecting it. How was it she had never seen it in that light before? How was it she had hoped and yearned and waited, and yet refused to take what lay within her reach? How was it she had always thought of God as a stern and angry Judge, and never as a kind and loving Father, patiently bearing with His wayward

child, and waiting to shower His rich gifts upon her?

Oh, it seemed so strange to Helen! So strange that God should care for her—that He should die for her—that after all these years of carelessness and folly He should deign to call her still!

Her heart thrilled with a sense of gratitude and love; and as she humbly bowed before that loving Father, she wept to think what her life had been.

Hours passed before she slept, but she heeded not the flight of time, or felt any sense of weariness. She was too deeply occupied with her new, strange thoughts to think of sleep, and day was breaking in the east before she sought her pillow. But when at last she grew more calm, and lay down to rest, it was with a feeling of calm, tranquil peace she had never known before.

### CHAPTER XIII.

**I**T was late when Helen awoke the next morning, but the strange peace had not departed.

As she dressed she thought over her conversation with Dr. Elliot, and she saw clearly at last the promises of the Gospel were for *her*—that Christ had died for *her*—that God had been lovingly calling all these weary months, only she had hardened her heart, and refused to hear His voice. The veil that had hidden the truth was now removed, and she wondered that she had been so wilfully blind.

The girl's heart beat high with one rapturous thought—God loved her! He had loved her in all her waywardness and sinfulness and pride—He loved her still; and the knowledge, while it gladdened her heart, humbled her beyond measure when she thought of the past. Only last night all had appeared dark and hopeless, and she knew

not where to turn for light; but God's hand had swept away the clouds, and the Sun of Righteousness had shone in upon her darkened soul. This morning she could say with the Apostle of old—"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

Ah, it was no distasteful duty now to kneel down and pray to Him! Her whole heart went up in gratitude and thanksgiving for His goodness and love. Everything seemed transfigured in the light of that love, and she could understand now Lucy Elliot's tranquil happiness.

She opened her window and looked out. It was a glorious morning. The sky was cloudless; the flowers bloomed brightly in the sunshine, and a light breeze rustled the trees, and fanned her cheek gently. The world had never looked so beautiful to her before. She saw in every tree, in every flower, an evidence of God's tender care for His children; and she thought for the first time how wonderful it was that men went on their way in life accepting His blessings without one thought of gratitude to Him.

She was still lingering at the window, drinking

in the fresh morning air, when she was surprised to see Dr. Elliot coming up to the house. She wondered what he could possibly want. Her aunt was not up yet; and besides he had seen her only last night.

She went downstairs to meet him, her heart beating a little. She felt a certain natural shyness at seeing him after their interview of last night, and her cheek flushed as she gave him her hand.

"Do you wish to see my aunt?" she asked. "She has not yet risen."

"I did not expect to find her up so early as this," he replied. "I have been seeing a patient, and am now on my way home. I called because I wish to speak to you."

There was a pause for a moment. Dr. Elliot stood silent, evidently at a loss what to say. A thought struck Helen. He had told her last night how he had watched her—how anxious he had been on her account; and it occurred to her that perhaps he had called to see if his words had helped and enlightened her at all. He might feel a delicacy in approaching the subject; and, though she rather shrank from it, she determined to introduce it herself.



"I have to thank you," she began, "for speaking to me as you did last night. I am ashamed to acknowledge that I tried to avoid you then, as I have avoided you many times of late, and I did not deserve your kindness. You opened my eyes to see things in quite a new light, Dr. Elliot."

He smiled, and shook his head.

"*God* opened your eyes, Miss Helen."

"Ah yes, I know!" she said softly.

"If He has seen fit to bless any words of mine to you, I humbly thank Him for it. I hope you have now found something to rely on—something to cling to in the time of trouble. Our life here is full of trials, Miss Hervey, and we need a sure refuge to fly to when the storms break over us."

His solemn tone struck her.

"In the midst of youth and health, when we feel strong and full of life, we may be cut down in a moment; and how sad then if we have no hope beyond the grave! I had an instance of this last night. One of our young fellow-townsmen was riding home, lighthearted and unconscious of danger, when his horse took fright at some sudden noise in the street, and he was thrown violently.

I was called in to see him after I left you. I have seen him again this morning."

"It is not very serious, I hope," said Helen.

"It is very serious, I fear. He was thrown with great violence on some iron palisades, and is injured frightfully, poor fellow!"

"Oh, how sad! Is it any one that I know, Dr. Elliot?"

He looked at her gravely.

"You know him well," he said.

Something in his tone struck her with a sense of alarm, and she looked up startled.

"He was at the pic-nic yesterday," added the doctor.

A sudden wild suspicion flashed across her mind, and she clasped her hands.

"O Dr. Elliot, it is not—tell me it is not Charlie!"

He was silent, but stood looking at her sadly and compassionately, and she was answered.

"It is Charlie," she said in a low tone.

"Yes," he said gently.

Helen stood still, her hands clasped, her senses stunned by the blow. Charlie injured—perhaps dying—gay, handsome, lively Charlie! Yesterday

so full of health and spirits—to-day laid upon a sick-bed from which he might never rise. Yesterday spending the hours in careless gaiety—to-day perhaps brought face to face with death. He was all unprepared to die—Helen felt that.

She sat down, and covered her face with her hand. It might have been herself, but God had mercifully spared her, and she felt more deeply than ever His forbearance and her own sin.

"They asked me to break the news to you," Dr. Elliot said, after a pause. "His mother and sister are overwhelmed with grief. They wish you to go to them, if you feel yourself equal to the task."

"Oh, yes, I will go," she answered in a stifled voice, but she did not look up; and Dr. Elliot, feeling his presence was no longer needed, left her to meet this new trial with what fortitude she might.

As soon as she was able, Helen went to her sorrowing friends. How changed everything looked since yesterday around that luxurious home! Then all was bustle and activity and pleasant excitement; now all was sadness and silence and gloom.

Emily had seen her coming, and met her at the door. She was very pale, her eyes were swollen

with weeping, and she had evidently passed a sleepless night. She clasped Helen in her arms, and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"O Nellie! Nellie!" she cried, in uncontrollable anguish.

Helen held her close, her own tears falling fast.

"Dear Emily, how is he?"

"Very ill!" sobbed Emily. "Nellie, we saw it all—mamma and I! Oh, the horror of that dreadful moment! I shall never forget it while I live!" and she shuddered. "They picked him up, all bleeding and unconscious, and I thought my heart would break! But come to mamma—she is in his room. Say a word of comfort to her, if you can, for she needs it sorely."

Helen followed her to the darkened room where Charlie lay. His mother sat by the bedside, but Helen did not see her at first—she forgot everything else when she saw the wan face upon the pillow.

The eyes were closed—the lips white and bloodless—the brow contracted as if in pain. Helen could hardly realise that it was Charlie. She had always seen him gay and bright and full of life—could this pale stricken man be he?

"He is asleep now," whispered Emily. "Dr. Elliot gave him an opiate before he left. See, here is mamma, Nellie."

Helen turned to her aunt, and bending over her, kissed her gently. Emily had spoken of comfort, but what could she say to comfort this sorrowing mother, whose idol and darling lay before her helpless and mangled, perhaps dying? She could only press her hand in silence, and mingle her tears with hers.

"Stay with us, Nellie!" pleaded her aunt. "He is fond of you, and you can comfort him perhaps, and comfort us all."

Helen did stay. Mrs. Falconer and Emily were almost as helpless as children in this the first great trouble they had ever known. They had no self-command, but wore themselves out with weeping and lamentations, instead of trying to make themselves useful. They had no experience, either, in a sick-room, and no idea what to do.

It was strange how they looked up to and depended upon Helen. They had hitherto regarded her as a rather weak, capricious girl, but they found out her value now. Accustomed to waiting on the sick—accustomed to repressing

her own feelings, and thinking only of others, she proved herself indispensable to them. When Dr. Elliot came again he was glad to find her there.

"Ah! we shall get on better now," he said. "Do beg Mrs. and Miss Falconer to try and control themselves a little. If they give way to such violent emotion I must forbid their entering my patient's room at all. They will worry and disturb him beyond measure."

Helen promised to speak to them, and when the doctor was gone she prevailed on them to lie down for a while.

She sat alone by the bedside, her heart sorrowful, her thoughts busy. It seemed very probable that Charlie would die, and she felt he was unfit to die. She thought with bitter self-reproach how many opportunities she had had of influencing him for good, and trying to lead his thoughts to higher and better things, and she had neglected those opportunities. How many precious hours she had frittered away foolishly that might have been spent in arousing him to his soul's need, and now it might be all those golden opportunities were gone for ever, and no more would be vouchsafed her. She prayed earnestly, passionately for

time to speak to him of heavenly things, and for grace to speak aright.

It was evening when Charlie awoke. As he looked up at the sad, sweet face near him, his eyes brightened, and a faint smile came to his lips.

"Ah, Nellie, you here!" he said feebly. "It is good of you to come, dear girl."

He tried to take her hand, but even at this slight movement a spasm of pain crossed his face.

"We little thought of this yesterday, Nellie!" he said.

"No; we do not know what is in store for us."

"I shall never be the same again," he went on gloomily. "To think that this should befall me in the very spring of life! To think that perhaps I have nothing to look forward to but long years of helplessness and suffering, and I had dreamt of such a happy future!"

Oh, poor Charlie! and this was the worst he feared! He thought he had years of life before him, and shrank from the thought of the pain they might bring, and yet it seemed to Helen that the shadow of death hung over him even now.

"God has some wise purpose in it, Charlie," she said to him. "He has been very good to you

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all your life, and perhaps in your happiness you were forgetting Him."

"He is very good to me now, certainly!" said Charlie bitterly.

"Better to you now, perhaps, in sending you this trial than if He had permitted you to go on in carelessness and thoughtlessness. It may be He has removed you from the world that He may draw your thoughts away from these earthly things, and reveal to you His love."

Charlie turned his head away impatiently.

"Don't preach, Helen!" he said fretfully. "It is bad enough to lie here in pain, without being told that my sins have brought this punishment upon me. A fellow needs a little sympathy at a time like this."

"I am truly sorry for you, Charlie, believe me!"

"Then don't worry me, child."

He closed his eyes, and lay motionless as if he wished to sleep. Helen sighed deeply. What could she say? how could she arouse him to see his true condition in the sight of God? She did not know; she felt all ignorant and helpless, but once again her heart went up in earnest prayer for help and guidance.



## CHAPTER XIV.

**D**AYS and nights of anxious watching followed; days full of suspense to Helen.

She waited on the suffering man with the same unwearying tenderness she had so recently shown to her aunt, and her quiet self-possession and unflagging devotion had its effect upon them all. She was a comfort and support to each of them — even Charlie seemed strengthened and refreshed by her calm, soothing presence. His mother and sister disturbed him by their loud demonstrations of grief and regret, and it was a relief to turn to this calm, gentle cousin.

So the work of attending to him fell chiefly upon Helen, and an old servant who had nursed him in his infancy, for Charlie would not hear of having a hired nurse in the house. "He was not going to be fussed over by a strange woman," he said; and they deferred to his wishes. Helen

preferred to have it so, for it would give her more opportunity for earnest conversation with him, she knew.

The girl was upheld by a strange, mysterious strength in this hour of trial. God seemed very near to her—the Everlasting Arms were around her, and she wondered at the sense of safety and rest that filled her soul.

And yet she was only experiencing what His children have done in all ages. God has ever been the strength and supporter of those who put their trust in Him. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Is not His holy Word full of blessed promises to those who come to Him for succour?

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." "The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade on thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from *all evil*: He shall preserve thy soul." "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

Helen was proving God's power to help now. In the midst of her trouble and anxiety a peace lay deep in her heart that nothing could take away—His peace which passeth understanding.

And yet she was deeply troubled—deeply anxious on Charlie's account. She longed to see him thinking of his soul's welfare; she prayed for him; but still to all outward appearance he remained indifferent.

She read to him out of the Book which was now so precious to her; she talked to him gently of the love of Christ; but her words seemed to wake no echo in his heart. He would listen coldly and indifferently, or impatiently beg her not to tease him; and Helen's heart grew sick with anxiety as the time went on. For she felt that his time on earth was short.

As day after day passed, and no improvement appeared, the knowledge came to her that he was surely passing away.

His own family grew more hopeful, and spoke cheerfully to him of soon having him well again; but a dark foreboding weighed down Helen's spirit, and she could not share their confidence.

One morning, as she saw the doctor approaching,

she went down to speak to him, determined to know the truth from his lips.

He looked inquiringly at her white face as she met him in the hall.

"You look pale," he said. "You are wearing yourself out, I fear."

"Oh, no, I am quite strong, but I am very, very anxious!" And her eyes filled with tears, and her voice faltered.

"What is it?" inquired Dr. Elliot. "Is my patient worse this morning?"

"No, I don't think he is any worse, but he is no better. Dr. Elliot, will he *ever* be any better?"

He shook his head.

"No, Miss Hervey, I have no hope of that. He may linger for a while, but all the medical men in England could not save him."

Helen clasped her hands.

"O Dr. Elliot, he does not dream of this! He looks forward to a long and painful illness, but he never doubts that he will recover eventually."

"He should know the truth at once, poor fellow! Shall I tell him, or will you?"

"You shall tell him, please; I cannot!"

Dr. Elliot left her, and went upstairs thought-

fully. He was wondering how he could best broach the subject; but he was soon relieved from his perplexity, for he had not been in the room long before Charlie introduced it himself.

"I am tired of lying here, doctor," he said. "I don't seem to get much better. Can't you do something more for me?"

"I have done what I can. I wish I could restore you to health and strength again; but if God ordains otherwise, of what avail is medical skill?"

Charlie looked at him steadily.

"What do you mean by that? Don't you think I shall ever recover?"

"Mr. Falconer, I cannot deceive you! I have seen from the first that you could not recover."

There was a moment's silence, and then Charlie said in a low voice—

"There is no hope, then?"

"There is no hope."

The invalid turned away his head for a while. Who knows what thoughts were passing through his mind! Men talk of meeting death bravely and fearlessly, but death is an awful thing when one is brought face to face with it, as Charlie Falconer was. To know that we must pass through the

dark valley, and face what lies beyond—the unknown land which no mortal eye has ever beheld—from which no mortal has ever returned to shed a light upon its solemn mystery: this is enough to make the stoutest heart quail with fear. Surely it is more foolhardiness than manliness to talk of entering the dread presence of God all unprepared to meet Him, and say we have no fear!

Even to the Christian, who knows that he is going home, there must be something awful in entering for the first time the presence of Him before whom angels veil their faces, and gaze upon the ineffable brightness of His glory; but to those who have no interest in Christ—no hope beyond this life, it must be appalling. Truly their spirits must shrink with fear as they come face to face with the last enemy.

Dr. Elliot stood looking down at the still figure before him, but he did not speak. He knew not what his thoughts were, and he feared to disturb him, for he thought perhaps God was speaking to him.

Presently Charlie turned his head and spoke.

"How long have I to live?" he asked.

"Not very long," replied Dr. Elliot, and his voice was full of tender pity. "I cannot exactly say how long—God alone knows; but the time must needs be short."

"I don't see that it matters much," said Charlie bitterly. "One must die some time, and it is better to die at once than linger on in helplessness and pain. At best my life would be a miserable one, and death will be the end."

"The end of what?" inquired the doctor, looking down at him gravely.

"Of everything," said Charlie.

Dr. Elliot shook his head.

"You do not believe that, I know," he said solemnly.

He was right—Charlie did not believe it. Down deep in his soul he felt there was something beyond death—something that he shrank from—something that he could not escape. Dr. Elliot pitied him from his heart.

"Thank God, death is not the end," he said; "thank God there is a happier, better life beyond the grave; a beautiful home where He dwells, where we may enter if we will."

He left the room and went downstairs to Helen.

"Do not go to him yet," he said to her; "he is better alone for a while."

"Poor Charlie! how does he bear it?" she asked.

"It is a great blow to him, of course, but he shows little of his inward feelings. May God grant him peace here and hereafter!"

When Helen went up to his room, she found him very pale, but calm. He looked at her as she seated herself beside him.

"Do you know?" he asked. "Has Elliot told you?"

"Yes, I know," she said quietly.

"It is rather hard to be cut off like this in one's youth and health, but I have the consolation of knowing I have made the most of the past. If my life has been a short one, it has been a pleasant one."

"O Charlie, do not think of the past—think of the future!"

"It will not bear thinking of, Nellie."

"But you must think of it. Do not waste the precious hours that yet remain to you in idle regrets, but pray for pardon for the past—for mercy for the future."



"Ah, Nellie, I have not prayed before, and it is too late to begin now."

"It is never too late. God is all merciful, and He hears the prayer of penitence, though it be offered at the eleventh hour. O Charlie, Charlie! would God I could arouse you to your danger!"

He did not speak. His head was turned away, and Helen could not see his face. After a moment's pause she opened her Bible and read the 55th chapter of Isaiah, dwelling earnestly on the gracious invitation, and praying for God's Spirit to bless the words to his soul. When she had concluded, she looked at him irresolutely.

"Shall I pray for you?" she asked.

"If you like," he replied in a cold, sullen tone. And Helen knelt down, and prayed long and earnestly. She prayed that God would illumine with His own true light the soul that was now hovering on the threshold of eternity—that, as He had seen fit, in His inscrutable wisdom, to call him away from this world, He would mercifully fit him to enter that land of never-ending bliss, where He Himself shall wipe the tears from every eye.

Charlie never moved nor spoke when she rose


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from her knees ; he might have been asleep for anything Helen knew ; and she turned away in bitter sorrow and disappointment.

So things went on, and there came no change. Helen read to him and prayed to him, and wept as she tried to touch his stubborn heart ; but if her words had any impression, he gave no sign.

Strong as Helen's faith was, and unwearying her efforts, she began to despair at last. As she saw him growing weaker every day, her heart failed her.

## CHAPTER XV.

NE evening as Helen sat by his bedside, she took up her Bible, and began to read. She opened the book at random, and scarcely knew what she read at first, for her heart was very sorrowful and heavy; but soon the sweet words stole on her ear like music, and fell like balm on her troubled heart.

It was the 103d Psalm that she was reading.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father



“With a little thrill at her heart, Helen went on : ‘As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.’”—P. 157.



pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust."

Helen looked up. Charlie's eyes were fixed upon her face earnestly. He usually lay with averted face while she read; but now it was evident he was giving attention to the words that fell from her lips.

With a little thrill at her heart, Helen went on:

"As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children."

She closed the book, and laid it down beside her.

"What sweet, comforting words! what gracious promises!" she said.

"Yes, it is all very good and pleasant," returned Charlie. "And it seems to comfort you; but it is not for me."

"It is as much for you as for me," said Helen.

He shook his head.

"You have always been a good little thing, and those cheering words may be meant for you; but I have been a worthless, careless fellow all my life, and they have nothing to do with me."

"Nothing to do with you! O Charlie, Charlie!"

"You always read the pleasant promises and the encouraging invitations, but you never touch upon the other side of the question. Does not the same book say, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell,' and, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die?'"

"Yes; but does it not also say, 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?' And again—'When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.' You have heard those words many a time in His house, Charlie; don't you believe them yet?"

He was silent.

"He says, too—'Whosoever will, let him take of

the water of life freely.' There is no restriction there, Charlie."

"Ah, Nellie, you don't know what a life mine has been!"

"No; but *He* knows, and still *He* says, 'Come unto Me.' 'Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.'"

"If I had had some useful employment I might have been a better man," said Charlie, half sadly; "but I had nothing to do—nothing to restrain me from folly, and I plunged recklessly into dissipation."

"Then ask Him to forgive it all. *He* will."

Charlie looked at her with a smile.

"You speak from the depths of your own warm, loving heart. You are such a compassionate, forgiving little creature!"

"And can you believe in *my* compassion and love, and yet doubt Him who is all tenderness and pity? *He will* forgive you, Charlie, if you will only ask Him."

Mrs. Falconer here entered the room, and Helen had no further opportunity of pursuing the subject; but her heart beat joyfully at the thought



that after all her prayers were being answered. And she thanked the great Ruler of all things that the slumbering soul was at last waking out of its lethargy.

Next day she spoke to him again.

"Charlie," she said, "I am very anxious about you."

He looked at her in silence. He knew what she meant, but he waited for her to explain herself.

"I know that you must leave us soon, but I do not know what is your hope for the future. Have you made your peace with God?"

He shook his head sadly.

"Ah, Nellie, I neglected Him in health and strength, and it is too late to seek Him now! I have but a few hours left to me on earth—how can I hope to atone for a life like mine?"

Helen laid her hand on his.

"It *is* atoned for, Charlie. If you had a lifetime before you, you could never atone yourself; but Christ died for you, and what more can be needed after that? None will ever enter heaven on their own merits, but only those who have on the wedding garment—the robe of His righteous-

ness. You know well how He paid the debt for you. You have heard of His sufferings and death all your life."

"It has always seemed to me a pleasant story with a sort of romantic interest attached to it, but nothing more. It seems real to you."

"It *is* real—oh, believe it! Christ *has* died for you, and He freely offers you eternal life, if you will only accept it at His hand. You say it is too late. It might be too late if anything remained for you to do, but Christ has done *all*.

'And His the blood that can for all atone,  
And set me faultless there before the Throne.'

Charlie closed his eyes and lay quite still, his hands clasped as if in prayer. Helen wondered if he were indeed in prayer, or only feigning sleep to put an end to the conversation.

By and by, as he neither looked up nor spoke to her again, she stole away disappointed, and sought her room to pour forth her heart in prayer for him once more.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**S**EPTEMBER was nearly at an end now, and the days were rapidly growing shorter. The nights and mornings were chill, but the days were warm and sunny, and the earth looked very fair in its autumnal beauty.

As the month waned Charlie grew feebler and feebler, and it became evident to them all that the end was very near now. The violence of their grief had subsided, and a solemn calm had fallen upon them. They were awed by the near approach of death, and they were waiting in hushed silence for his coming.

Ah, it was hard for them to see the son and brother they had been so proud of, passing away for ever—hard for their undisciplined hearts to bear such a sorrow, the first they had ever been called upon to undergo. But a higher power than theirs was ruling here; and though their proud

hearts might chafe and rebel, they had to submit to the will of God.

Helen thought not of the approaching separation; she did not look forward, as the others did, to the pain of parting; her mind was ever dwelling on one anxious thought—was he prepared to go? Was he really trusting in Christ, and laying hold of the promises held out to him in the Gospel.

For Charlie was very reticent, and never spoke to her on the subject. He listened while she read and prayed with him, and never showed indifference or weariness as he had done at first, but he never told her what was passing in his heart, and Helen was fain to leave it in God's hand, and trust blindly to His mercy.

There came a day when Dr. Elliot said—"His time is very short now;" and very soon afterwards he said—"He will not live to see another day."

They all gathered round him then, and watched in breathless suspense for the end to come.

It was evening, and the sun was shining against the closely-drawn blind, and a faint breeze came in at the open window, when the dying man opened his eyes and looked round him. He had

lain in a sort of stupor for some hours, and they had thought he would pass away so ; but his eyes were bright with intelligence now, as they rested on the loving faces near him.

He made an effort to speak, but his voice was very low and weak, and Helen bent down to listen.

"Draw up the blind," he said, "and let me see the sunlight for the last time."

Emily obeyed him, and the rays of the evening sun flooded the room with light.

His dim eyes lighted with pleasure.

"It is the last time!" he repeated softly.

Helen stooped over him.

"Yes, you are about to enter the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Charlie. Is Christ with you?"

He looked up with a smile.

"Yes," he said ; "it is all well ! Do not fear for me, Helen. I see it all now ! Thank God, I see the way to heaven is freely open to us all, no matter what our lives have been !"

Helen laid her hand on his.

"'Not by works of righteousness which we have done.'"

"No!" he interrupted quickly; "or how could I ever hope to enter there?"

He folded his hands, and with a far-off gaze repeated dreamily the words of a hymn Helen sang to him sometimes :

"Yea, Thou wilt answer for me, Righteous Lord :  
Thine all the merits, mine the great reward ;  
Thine the sharp thorns, and mine the golden crown,  
Mine the life won, and Thine the life laid down !"

A low sob from his mother roused him.

"Don't cry, mother," he said.

"Oh ! my son, my son ! if I could only restore you to health and strength again !"

"It is better as it is ; is it not, Helen ?"

"I hope so, Charlie ; I hope God is calling you to Himself, and that must be better than lingering in this world of suffering and sin."

"Yes," said Charlie again, "it is better as it is. Nellie, I used to sneer at you for being religious. You forgive me now, don't you ?"

"Forgive you ! O Charlie, you were forgiven long ago !"

"I didn't know then," he said dreamily ; "I do now."

"At eventide there shall be light." Once more

in His merciful compassion, God had fulfilled His promise, and in the evening of his life, when his earthly sun was setting, the true Light had shone into the dying man's soul.

"Sing, Nellie," he said faintly; "sing 'Rock of Ages.'"

Helen obeyed, in a voice tremulous at first, but steadier as she proceeded and the sublime appealing words found their way to her heart. Charlie listened with his eyes fixed upon her face.

As her voice died away he looked round upon them all with a faint smile; then closed his eyes and lay still.

The sun went down like a great globe of fire; the darkness deepened over the earth; the moon sailed up white and round in the sombre evening sky; and still they stood in silence watching him. The shadows fell darker and darker in the room; the night wind blew chill through the open window, and they who stood around him shivered in its frosty breath; but he lay motionless, unmindful of the cold, unmindful of the gathering darkness.

A grey shadow had crept over his face; but

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none saw it in the gathering gloom. They thought that he was sleeping; but as they stood waiting for him to wake, the end had come; and as the solemn night fell over the earth an everlasting day had dawned for Charlie.



## CHAPTER XVII.

**I**T was Christmas Day. Three months had elapsed since the death of Charlie Falconer, and time, which mercifully softens the bitterness of all human woes, had somewhat subdued the grief of his sorrowing family.

At first they were inconsolable, but the first sharp sense of bereavement and loss had worn away now, and the first passionate pain had given place to a softened melancholy.

Their sorrow had had a chastening effect on the Falconers, which Helen was glad to see. They were quieter, humbler, less arrogant and overbearing to those in their employ, and more considerate to all around them.

The change was especially noticeable in their behaviour to Miss Falconer. They who had stood aloof from her before, and ridiculed her without mercy, now sought her society, sent her little

offerings of fruit and flowers, and by many a little kindness showed that they wished to make amends for their past coldness and estrangement.

The change was not altogether in them alone. Miss Falconer herself had undergone a change in the past year of suffering she had experienced. In her weakness and helplessness she had learned to see the worthlessness of all the good works she had been unconsciously depending on her whole life, and the discovery had humbled her pride and self-righteousness in the dust.

She had been wont to regard her brother and his family as careless, thoughtless people, hardly fit to associate with her, whose whole life had been spent in the service of God; but all was changed now, and she met their advances frankly, with the same earnest desire to atone for the mistakes of the past that was the secret main-spring of their altered conduct.

So it happened that those who had lived apart in their years of health and happiness were drawn together in the time of trouble.

Christmas had always been a time of much festivity with the Falconers. They had been accustomed to fill their house with company, and

the handsome rooms had re-echoed to the sound of merry feet and joyous music. But of course it was different now, and the only Christmas guests they invited were Helen and her aunt.

"Come to us, Harriet," Mr. Falconer said. "It is a time for reunion and goodwill towards each other, and we shall be quite alone. You shall do just as you please, and Helen can see that your wants are attended to as if you were at home."

So Miss Falconer left her home for the first time for many months, and went to spend Christmas with her brother.

It was a very quiet little party that gathered round Mr. Falconer's well-spread table, for the thought of Charlie would come to mar their enjoyment. Those who have suffered a bereavement know how such anniversaries are full of painful associations connected with the loved and lost ones, and bring back tender memories of by-gone days when they were with us, and their happy faces were the sunlight of our home. But a certain wise man has said it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, and God was nearer to them now in

their loneliness and sorrow, than He had been in their hours of careless revelry and mirth.

Helen went to spend the evening with Lucy Elliot. Since Charlie's death she had visited the sick girl frequently, and they had become fast friends. Lucy had begged Helen to come on Christmas Day, if only for an hour or two in the evening, and Helen had promised.

The cold wintry weather tried poor Lucy very severely, and much of her time she was confined to her own room ; but to-day, as she was feeling better, they carried her downstairs. Her sofa was wheeled to the warmest corner by the fire, all draughts carefully excluded, and the dinner-table drawn close to her side, that they might enjoy the meal together.

It was a very happy little family gathering. Knowing that it would give his mother and Lucy pleasure, Dr. Elliot had contrived to be at home most of the day ; and in the enjoyment of his society Lucy forgot her pain and weakness, and was perfectly happy.

But Dr. Elliot was compelled to go out in the afternoon ; and then the unwonted excitement and exertion of talking to him began to have its

effect, and Lucy grew weary and languid. Her mother, watching her, saw that she was inclined to sleep, and she quietly stole out of the room, and left her to herself. Then the soothing influences around her—the warmth of the bright fire, the peaceful silence of the room, fell softly on the tired senses of the invalid, and she was soon sleeping as calmly as a little child.

Helen found her so when she arrived shortly afterwards.

She did not disturb her, but quietly laying aside her outer garments, seated herself by the window. She was a frequent visitor now, and came and went without any ceremony.

As she sat looking out at the wintry landscape, she thought of that bright spring evening, the first she had ever spent at this house, when she had sat here and listened to Lucy's cheerful conversation, and wondered at her tranquil happiness.

How much had happened since then! What a change had been wrought in her life! Then she was all in darkness—now the light had shone upon her path, and turned the night into noonday.

How great the change, too, at her uncle's house!

Then they had been a gay, careless family, seeking their own enjoyment, and caring for nothing else: and now what were they?—a quiet, saddened little group—in their hearts one common sorrow, on their hearth a vacant chair.

Charlie was gone, but he was *safe*, Helen hoped and believed. Safe for ever in that bright abode to which she some day hoped to follow him. Only a few months ago he had been a careless, prayerless, worldly man, indifferent to the claims of religion, and a stranger to God; but God in His goodness and Almighty power had wrought a marvellous change, and in cutting short his earthly career, had opened to him the gates of Everlasting Life.

While she was thinking of all these things, Dr. Elliot came in.

With a glance at the sleeping Lucy, Helen held up her finger warningly, and he came softly across the room to her side.

“Has Lucy gone to sleep and left you to your own resources?” he inquired.

“She was asleep when I came in,” said Helen, “and I did not disturb her.”

“Have you been here long?”

"About half an hour."

"I am afraid you have been lonely."

"Oh, no; I have been so occupied with my thoughts that the time has passed quickly."

"They were pleasant thoughts, then, I infer," he said, smiling.

"Yes; I have been thinking how good God has been to me in the past year."

He looked at her with his own peculiarly beautiful smile.

"Yes, He is always good, only we are so loth to remember and acknowledge it. We are so apt to accept His blessings as our right, without feeling grateful to Him for what He bestows. We are ready enough to fret when misfortunes come, but we are not so ready to thank Him for His manifold mercies."

"I am sure you are right," said Helen. "I have not been half grateful to Him for His goodness, I know."

She sat looking thoughtfully out at the far-off hills, her heart swelling with emotions too deep for utterance. Dr. Elliot stood leaning against the window-frame, watching her, and thinking how she had changed since first he knew her.

There was silence for a while, both busy with their own thoughts ; then Helen, rousing herself, turned and looked at the sleeping figure on the sofa.

"Poor Lucy! how soundly she sleeps!" she said.

"Yes," he returned ; "I am sorry she is asleep now you are here ; but she passed a disturbed night, and she really needs a little rest."

"Then let her enjoy it by all means," said Helen.

Dr. Elliot stood looking at his sister with loving eyes.

"I am glad she has found a friend in you," he said. "She has never before enjoyed the companionship and sympathy of one of her own sex, and she values your friendship very highly. She has been telling me this afternoon that she loves you like a sister."

"I am sure her affection is reciprocated," said Helen.

Dr. Elliot's manner suddenly changed. A flush rose to his dark cheek as he seated himself beside Helen, and took both her hands in his.

"Will you be her sister in reality?" he asked.  
"Will you be my wife, Helen?"



She looked up in startled surprise, but at the expression in his eyes her own fell, and her colour rose.

"Dr. Elliot, I have never thought—never imagined"—she stopped, and her voice trembled.

"No, perhaps not, but you can think of it now. I am many years older than you, my dear, but I love you, and will try hard to make you happy, if you will give yourself to me."

He was a man of few words, but he meant what he said, it was clear. He made no passionate protestations, but the warm, close pressure of his hand, and the earnest light in his dark eyes spoke more eloquently than the most high-flown language.

"What do you say, Helen? Can you care for a staid, grave man like me?"

"I honour and esteem you above all men, but"——

"But what, my child?"

"I am not worthy to be your wife. You are such a good man, and I am so young and ignorant. You would find me so different from your mother and Lucy, and you would be disappointed in me."

He smiled.

"The question is, Can you be happy with me?" he said.

"I could be happy, but could I make you happy?"

"Let me ask you another question, Are you willing to try?"

She looked at him timidly, the colour deepening on her cheek.

"If you are willing to take me, all inexperienced as I am, and bear with my faults, I will do my best to make you happy."

He drew her to him.

"My darling!" he said; and with the word Helen found herself clasped close to his heart, and felt that a new happiness had entered her life.

The rest of the evening passed like a dream to her.

Mrs. Elliot and Lucy had to be told the wonderful news, and very much astonished they were; for Dr. Elliot had kept his secret well, and they had never suspected the state of his feelings.

But they were unfeignedly glad for all that. Lucy was delighted beyond measure at the

thought of having her dear friend for a sister. and Mrs. Elliot was too devoted a mother not to rejoice at her children's happiness. Besides this, she loved Helen for her own sake; and so her motherly embrace was very loving and warm, and her congratulations very earnest and sincere.

It gladdened Helen's heart to find how warmly she was received into this little family, and what real pleasure the prospect of her near relationship afforded the unselfish mother and daughter.

A little jealousy might have been excusable at another sharing the heart of the son and brother who had been all in all to them; but none was evinced, and none was really felt. There was nothing but pure joy that Robert had won such a dear girl for his wife, and that she would come to be the sunlight of their happy home.

Dr. Elliot walked home with Helen in the moonlight, and talked of their future hopes and prospects.

"I cannot offer you a home apart from my mother and Lucy," he said, "for we have lived together all our lives, and we could not bear to separate now, neither do I think you would wish it."

"I should be very selfish and unreasonable if I did wish it," said Helen energetically. "Your mother and Lucy have been very kind to me, and if they are willing to receive me into their home, what more can I desire? It would grieve me very much to be the cause of separation between you, when you have lived together so long and so happily."

"I should not think of asking some women to share our home, circumstanced as we are, but my mother and sister love you, and will try to make you happy, I am sure."

"How strange it all seems!" said Helen presently. "How little I thought of this when I came to your house this afternoon! I cannot understand how it is you should care for me."

He looked amused.

"Does it seem so wonderful that any one should fall in love with you?" he asked. "It seems the most natural thing in the world to me. Your cousin loved you, did he not?" he added softly.

"Oh, yes; poor Charlie! But you are so different!"

"Then you did not give me credit for so much good taste?"

"I should have given you credit for better taste," said Helen. "It seems so strange that a good man like you should ever learn to love me, when you knew me in my days of carelessness and wilfulness."

"Ah, Helen, I loved you then, though I did not then thoroughly understand my own heart. Looking back now, I know why it was that my heart yearned over you, when I saw you groping blindly in the darkness, and why I experienced such heart-felt joy when you emerged from your difficulties and perplexities, and found rest and peace in Christ."

Helen's eyes filled with tears.

"I shall never understand it!" she said. "I shall never know what you saw in me to call forth such kindly interest and affection. But one thought comes home to my heart. If human love can cling so closely round an unworthy object, what must God's love be like? How tender and compassionate—how patient and long-suffering—how unchanging and free! No wonder that it bends the stubborn will and melts the stony heart!"

A few months afterwards, when the spring sun was shining, and the spring flowers were blooming, there was a wedding at Mr. Falconer's house. It was a very quiet little wedding. There was no crush of carriages—no crowd of wedding guests—no bevy of bridesmaids—no pomp or display such as Mr. Falconer would have insisted upon a year ago.

But it was a very happy wedding for all that. It was the union of two hearts, happy in each other's affection, and looking to God for His blessing on their marriage. Two hearts filled with one common love to their Heavenly Father—one common trust in Christ—one common hope of everlasting life.

Such happiness as theirs must endure, for it was founded upon a rock, "and that Rock was Christ." Sorrow might come upon them; the storms of life might beat upon their heads; but they had a refuge to fly to in their distress, and a calm haven awaiting them at last.

Helen met with a warm reception at her new home. Loving hands had prepared it for her coming, and loving hearts were waiting to welcome her.

Under some circumstances it might have been unwise in Dr. Elliot taking a wife to live with his mother and sister; but when the love of God reigns in the heart there can be no bickering and strife, and when He who makes men to be of one mind in a house, gives peace, who can make trouble?

The closer intimacy between the three women only served to strengthen their affection for each other, and Dr. Elliot had never occasion to repent bringing them together.

On the contrary, their home was happier and brighter for the presence of Helen among them.

As for the young wife herself, her heart was full of peace and joy—full of gratitude to God for having ordered her lot so wisely and happily; and all her life long she never forgot to thank Him for His goodness in bringing her out of darkness into His own marvellous light.

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